

APRIL 14, 2024 – WHY ARE YOU SO TERRIFIED? Where is your hope?
Luke 24: 35-48

Today we find ourselves in the gospel of Luke and we're still in the Upper Room from last week. Jesus is appearing to His disciples. It's a gospel that I'm pretty comfortable that most of us would know this gospel.

In fact, we could probably paraphrase the story from memory, which on the one hand, would be a good thing, but on the other hand, not so good because we've become numb to the reality of what's going on here.

So, today what I want you to try to do for me, and it's going to be hard, but I want you to try to put away all you think you know about Jesus and imagine that you are hearing this story with fresh ears for the first time.

I want you to imagine that the last three days of your life have been the worst three days of your life. You've been following this man, Jesus of Nazareth, for three years.

He's your rabbi, He's your friend, He's your leader. You've heard Him say incredible things. You've seen Him do incredible miracles.

You have seen all kinds of healings up close and personal. Lepers are cleansed, the blind can see, the dead are raised, and you see it all, front row seats. So, in your mind, Jesus is the guy, the promised Messiah that rabbis have been talking about for over 600 years.

The evidence is overwhelming, but here's the problem. He's not acting like the Messiah that you're looking for. He's not a warrior king. He doesn't seem to be really interested in politics at all. He's certainly not trying to take over in any way. And instead of going to the Sanhedrin or the high priests, the Pharisees, or the Sadducees, He's coming to us. In fact, the other day when He was coming into Jerusalem for the Passover, seemed like the whole town came out to greet Him.

So, Jesus, He's the one.

He's the one that God has promised will save Israel. Then in a matter of moments, everything just goes to hell.

Literally hell comes to visit as Judas, who's been with us all these years, turns on us, leading the temple guards to where we're sleeping.

They arrested Jesus.

They took Him away from us for the first time in three years and then we hear that there was a trial in the middle of the night, which is against Mosaic law, and

they found Him guilty, which is not good because if He's guilty, well, then you know we're guilty too.

And then Peter, who's the strongest among us, our fearless leader, after swearing he'd go down fighting, denied he even knew Him three times. Next time we saw Jesus, He was on the balcony at Pilate's palace.

And just when it looked like Pilate was going to let Him go, the same people that were shouting Hosanna in the highest just a couple of days ago started screaming, "Crucify, crucify." So, they tortured Him.

It was horrifying.

The cries of His agony as they literally whipped the flesh off His back.

We kept on waiting for something to happen.

We kept on waiting for something to happen, do something, some kind of miracle, bring fire from heaven. Maybe you can get Moses and Elijah to come back down here and sort things out.

But nothing happened and no help came.

And then they made Him drag the cross through the streets.

I mean it was awful. Still nothing.

Marching Him all the way to Calvary where they nailed Him to a cross and lifted Him up between two thieves and we all abandoned Him.

Heard later that He screamed out that God Himself had abandoned Him and then He died.

And you know, messiahs don't die.

So maybe we were wrong.

Three years we followed Jesus.

We had thought that He was the one that would redeem Israel, but maybe we were wrong.

Good thing Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus have connections with Pilate, and they managed to get him to allow us to take the body off the cross and put it in a decent tomb. Otherwise, He'd still be hanging there.

But as bad as this is, it's just gotten worse because the body has come up missing.

Oh yeah.

Some of the women that we know went to the tomb and found it empty and then came back with this crazy story that they had seen Jesus.

And both Peter and John ran down there and checked it out and it was indeed empty.

His body was gone, but Him they did not see. But let me ask you a question.

Who do you think they're going to blame for this? Us.

Jesus said a lot of crazy things, things I still can't understand. In fact, just the other night at dinner, He started talking about eating His flesh and drinking His blood to remember Him.

Well, evidently a servant must have overheard what He said, and it spread the word far and wide that we're cannibals, and not only did we steal the body, but we stole the body to eat the body.

So, you know, this is not good.

And besides all this, two of our own, you know, fellow disciples just like us, following around Jesus for three years, but evidently, they were on their way home to Emmaus and some guy came up, they didn't recognize Him, who hours later turned into Jesus and then disappeared. I mean, really? What's going on?

Now all of a sudden, He's here. Out of thin air Jesus appears.

Doesn't come through the door, doesn't climb through a window, just comes through the wall, just appears. Tell me, my friend, how would you react?

Imagine that you love somebody dearly, but you lost them. They died and now you've just come back from the funeral and they're standing in your kitchen. How would you feel?

Jesus, after suffering this horrible death, is now all of a sudden standing in front of His disciples asking, "Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts?"

And I'm thinking, really?

Do these disciples deserve this rebuke from Jesus? But then again, this is far from the first time that Jesus has asked that question, "Why are you so terrified?"

We talked about this last week.

Remember I had mentioned that Jesus says fear not or be not afraid, or why are you so terrified, some version of that.

In the New Testament He says that more than He says to love.

So obviously this is very important.

Peace be with you.

My mind goes through the gospel, the storm at sea. Remember that?

I love that gospel.

It's something that continues to happen in that part of the world to this day.

The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by the Jordanian mountains. It's beautiful.

They rise about 6,000 feet surrounded like a bowl.

And it can be a clear day and not a cloud in the sky and all of a sudden, those clouds can come over the top of those mountains and as that cold air rushes down to meet the warmer air of the water, it can kick up a squall like that.

Next thing you know, you're in a huge storm. Locals call them boomers.

That's kind of how life is.

But keep in mind, these are seasoned fishermen.

These disciples grew up on that lake and they're terrified.

So, it must have been a terrible storm.

They thought they were going to die, and Jesus is in the back of the boat sleeping.

Have you ever felt like Jesus is sleeping through your storm?

So, they wake Him up and He looks at them and He asks, "**Why are you so terrified? Am I not with you? Am I not here?**"

You might be going through a storm today, right now. If so, hear me when I say Jesus is standing in front of you asking the same question. Why are you so terrified?

Am I not with you? Am I not here? Hang on.

Jesus appears through His disciples, and you can see that it is very important to Jesus that they know that it is Him.

He's not a ghost.

"Look at my hands and look at my feet and see that it is I myself. Touch me and see because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see that I have." So, it is very important to Jesus that He makes a point that He is there not a ghost, not some group hallucination. He is physically, literally with them.

At this, He showed them His hands and His feet. Now watch this.

The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord while they were still **incredulous** for joy and were amazed. Which that's a bit odd because incredulous means that you don't really believe yet, but at the same time you're filled with joy. How does that even make sense?

It's almost like it's just too good to be true.

Have you ever had that situation where you really, really, really wanted to believe something, but it just too good to be true?

Why are you so terrified?

Well, I can think of a number of reasons why they would be terrified, beginning with the fact

that dead people generally don't come back to life. Okay?
I would start there.
And while we're talking about it, live people don't just appear and disappear either.
We live in a world that is defined by many realities. Gravity is one of them.
Water is wet, you can't walk on it.
And one big reality is that people don't come back from the dead, especially after three days.
I mean, that's dead dead.

And another thing that life has taught us is that the future is often unpredictable and life at times can become difficult. And as we struggle with the uncertainties of life, we often find ourselves alone. And when that happens, it opens up just a little door and that's where Satan enters and sows fear in our hearts. We live in a world that is constantly trying to entice us to worry about things.
It is the nature of a fallen, fractured planet. Things are clearly not as they should be. Consequently, anxiety is always trying to find a way to worm itself into your mind. As a result, people are not happy.
I mean, we might not be terrified, but there is a collective anxiety. Is that you?
If so, let me challenge you.
I want you to bring to mind your greatest fear. Maybe it's a physical thing, maybe it's a financial thing, some trial, whatever that is, something that you fear the most and when you look at it, nothing seems to stare back at you.

Whatever that is, I want you to try to bring that to mind and realize that Jesus is standing in front of you today, right now asking you why are you so terrified? Why are you so terrified?
Am I not with you?
Remember when you were young and maybe you had a nightmare?
Maybe you were lying in bed, and you saw a shadow in the closet, or maybe you had convinced yourself that there was a monster under your bed.
What did you do?
You ran into your parents' bedroom, and they told you it's going to be okay.
It's just your imagination.

There are no monsters under your bed.
There are no monsters in your closet.
You're safe.
And your fears? What happened?
They went away. Why?
Because you trusted your parents and they were with you.
This is the deeper meaning of our gospel today. This is how we can apply it into our daily living. God is telling you right now, hold on, I got this. Stop inventing things to worry about. Stop allowing your imagination to create terror. Think about it.
Think about in the past all the stuff that you have worried about.
How much of that stuff came to pass?
Why are you so terrified?
Am I not with you?
I know you believe in God, but do you trust Him?
As children, when we ran to the arms of our parents without fears, we trusted them. We believed them when they said it was going to be okay.
Unless you have the heart of a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.
What He is trying to say is this. God wants us to have that same childlike trust in Him. You believe in God.
I know you believe in God.
You would not be watching this program if you didn't believe in God.
That's not the question.
The question is, do you trust Him?
Do you trust your Savior?
Not in yourself, not this world, but Him.
And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that where I am you also may be.
Do you believe that?
I'm the light of the world?
Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.
Do you believe in that?
I'm the resurrection and the life.
The one who believes in me will live even though they die.
Do you believe in that?
I will never leave you orphans.
I will come to you and my Father, and I will make our dwelling place with you.
Do you believe in that?
I will be with you until the end of time.
Do you believe in that?
We believed our parents because we trusted them.

Can we trust Jesus?

In our gospel today, we have the extraordinary circumstance of a resurrected Jesus standing in front of His disciples and it's just too good to be true.

My friends, He stands in front of you today.

Many of us profess to be Christians, yet we still allow fear to rule our lives.

The simple test of whether you believe or not is the peace you will have.

If you truly believe in what Jesus is saying to you, then you'll have peace, and the wolves of fear will be kept at bay.

But if you don't, you won't.

Fear.

As a clergy person, I see it everywhere.

People come to me and they're worried, full of anxiety.

Always worried.

Afraid.

Asking, what am I going to do?

What am I going to do?

Like I said, we live in a world that's stokes that fear.

It trades on that fear.

It teaches us to fear every day because it wants to control us.

Meanwhile, the promises of Christ remain unfulfilled, not because He's unfaithful, not because He is untrustworthy, but because we never claim them.

In fact, truth be told, as long as we're talking about this, most of us don't even know what the promises of Christ are, because the prince of this world is desperately trying to keep you from the promises of Christ, and he's been pretty successful.

Which is why I say so many of us are ignorant of the promises of Christ and our minds remain closed to the spiritual truth of scripture.

He said to them, "These are my words that I've spoken to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me and in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

Then He opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

Now that line right there, "Then He opened their minds to understand the scripture," that line could be the Rosetta stone of the entire good news.

I mean, it could be the most important.

It's hard to say, but that could be the most important line of all of scripture.

He opened their minds to understand the scripture. Why?

Because it suggests that scripture in and of itself is not self-evident.

It's not a novel.

It's not a history book.

It's different. It's alive.

And it seems to require the opening of one's mind by something or somebody, and that's something or somebody is Jesus, to understand.

But if we never even take the time to read it, how will we even know what to believe?

Speaking of the promises of Christ, you know what I'm talking about?

I'm talking about the promises of the Holy Spirit.

I'm talking about the comforter, the Paraclete, the advocate that will teach us all things.

It's the quiet voice.

We talk about this all the time.

The quiet voice that will open up your mind and lead you to His will.

It's a quiet voice that will teach you not only what to believe, but how to believe.

And it is asking you this question today.

Why are you so terrified?

You might be going through a storm right now.

Understand this.

The waves might be big, and your boat might be small as it is tossed to and fro.

Hear me when I say that Jesus is not only aware of your storm, He's in your boat.

Why are you so terrified?

Am I not with you?

Why are you so frightened?

Why are you weeping?

I know you believe in me, but will you trust me?