

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER, ZION, 2021

The disciples were terrified. They hid together in their dwelling in Jerusalem. They huddled together. They were trembling with fear. They didn't know if Roman soldiers or temple guards would burst through the doors at any moment and arrest them all. They might all die. Just like Jesus died. Scourged with whips. Nailed to wooden blanks. They didn't know what would happen.

Then Jesus comes and stands among them. Into their uncertainty He speaks words of reassurance. He presents them with the evidence on which we ground our faith. He shows them His risen, glorified body. He says "I'm alive! It's me!" At first the disciples were terrified. They think they're seeing a ghost.

This makes us ask ourselves one fundamental question. An essential question: how would you react if Jesus appeared to you? Would you recognize him? In our Gospel passage, the disciples did not recognize Him.

So, He shows them his hands and feet. He tells them that he is no ghost. He is real. He has flesh and bones. The risen body of our Lord is both real and material. He shows them the holes where he was pierced in his flesh. Those wounds would never fully heal, never. Think about that, what God himself was willing to do for you and me.

By now the doubts of most of them were dissipating. They still did not fully understand, but now they marveled with joy. This is one of my favorite scriptures.

"But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

I just love that. They "disbelieved with joy." It was too good to be true. They couldn't believe their eyes. How could such a transforming, life changing thing be true?

There was something strange about how Jesus died. There were a series of strange reports. There was an earthquake while Jesus was on the cross. Before the earthquake there had been three hours of darkness, from noon until 3. The two women who went to the tomb said they saw Jesus there, and he was alive. But most of them didn't believe it. Rumors spread that the curtain that separated the holy of holies in the temple had been torn in two from top to bottom. It was being said that this barrier that separated the people from God in the temple had been torn in two at the very moment Jesus died. What was happening? What was going on? Prior to our text, two of Jesus' followers had just arrived. They told the story of how they were walking on the Emmaus road and were talking to a fellow traveler. They talked for some time. Then they realized that the man walking with them was Jesus! Then he suddenly vanished. What a strange story! Then Jesus suddenly appears right in front of all of them. And he says "I'm alive! It's me!" The disciples are terrified. They think they're seeing a ghost.

How would you react if Jesus appeared to you? Would you recognize Him?

Jesus did something eternal for us. Today he bears those same marks. He still has the hole in his side where the spear was driven into his abdomen. And Jesus is alive. Jesus is alive right now!

And He is hard at work. He's active in the world through his body, the church. That's us. He's active in heaven, the reality beyond this world, where God lives. He is actively interceding for us. He is talking to God the Father on our behalf. He is asking for God the Father to have mercy on us who are in the world. He is also active preparing our dwelling place in the eternal city of God, our new heavenly home.

Why then are we so often like the disciples? Why are we so afraid? We often fear and misunderstand what God is doing in our lives. Just like the disciples didn't understand that Jesus intentionally went to the cross for the purpose of being a sacrifice for our sins.

It's frightening when things go wrong in our lives. We often don't understand what's happening. Especially when something terrible happens. But often it's a blessing in disguise. It is often God's way of molding us into the image of Christ.

That first Easter day the disciples must've thought it was over. Jesus had died. That was it. End of story. It's the same in our lives. We think it's over, but it isn't over.

Yet we so often doubt God. Why do we doubt? Why did the disciples doubt Jesus? I mean they could see him. He was right there in front of them. They could touch his hands and feet. He was right there in the room, yet they were still doubting.

We often have the same problem today. We've seen how Jesus has transformed our lives. We've seen how Jesus has changed the lives of our loved ones. We've seen it all. Yet we still doubt.

It's natural to doubt the supernatural. We don't naturally see things like resurrection. We are not always aware of the miracles that are taking place around us. But it's really not that difficult when you think about it. I mean, think about it, God made the world from nothing. Everything we see. How hard is it then for Him to resurrect Jesus from the dead?

In any case, it's wise to consider all the facts in a situation. So, I'd like to share with you two quotations from prominent thinkers about the resurrection of Christ. A man by the name of Timothy Paul Jones wrote: **"The central claim of the NT is that Jesus was physically resurrected after being crucified.**

If this claim arose from decades of embellishment instead of historical truth, then Jesus is dead, the apostles were liars, and our faith is worthless. But evidences from the first and second centuries reveal that eyewitness testimony about Jesus emerged rapidly and circulated reliably. The NT texts relied on testimonies from apostolic eyewitnesses, and all of these texts were completed while the eyewitnesses were still alive. That's why we can declare with confidence: Don't worry; I read the book. He didn't stay dead."

Nabeel Qureshi, a Muslim man who converted to Christianity wrote, **"After studying the historical origins of the Christian faith, I came to these conclusions: that Jesus died on the cross is as certain as anything historical can be; that he rose from the dead is by far the best explanation of the events surrounding his death; and that Jesus claimed to be God is the best explanation for the immediate Christian proclamation of Jesus' deity. Putting it all together: Jesus claimed to be God, and he proved it by rising from the dead. The case for Christianity is powerful."**

Those are really powerful historical evidences for the resurrection. Atheists often try to make it seem like we Christians believe in some legendary myth, but any real historian knows the Christian faith is rooted deeply in history.

I want to direct your attention to verse 44, where Jesus plainly tells them, **“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”**

Jesus is saying, essentially, I told you this would happen. This was the plan all along. It was promised that one in the line of Adam would crush the head of Satan. Everything in the Old Testament was pointing forward to the coming of Jesus. Genesis. Exodus. Every book. It all points to Jesus.

Look at verses 46 through 48. This is really powerful. “Jesus said **“This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”**

I want to direct you toward the word “repentance” in verse 47. We serve a holy God. A God who commands us to repent of our sins. What does it mean to repent? To repent means we turn away from sin and live the way God wants us to live.

Jesus is essentially telling his disciples: I died on the cross. I was resurrected on the third day. Now the plan must move forward. Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all the nations. People will be washed in my blood. They will be made Holy because I, the Holy one, am living in and through them. Their lives will be changed completely.

And that’s exactly what has happened over the last two thousand years. The message of the gospel has spread across the face of the Earth. From Jerusalem. Across Europe. Down into Africa. To the east. To the west. To the south. To the north, and today here in north America. Virtually every nation on the planet has heard the gospel. It’s changed billions of lives. Jesus’ plan is being fulfilled.

Jesus is alive right now! He is in heaven. And the ultimate culmination of history is when Jesus Christ returns.

Just like the disciples, we often tremble in fear. Fear at what we see happening in the world around us. We can't imagine how things could change or get better. Just like the disciples, we often doubt Jesus' power. But then Jesus walks in the door. He stands in our midst. He reminds us powerfully: Here I am. I'm alive right now. And you are my disciples.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples they went from men and women whimpering in fear to mighty proclaimers of the resurrection. Men and women willing to die for their witness of Christ. We are all such witnesses. Jesus is alive. He will help you so live zealous service in true holiness, and freedom from sin.

Stay on fire for God. Live out your faith in Christ. Because Christ is alive right now. And He is coming, indeed He is at the door.

In the Gospels, like today's, whenever Jesus asks questions like, "Why are you troubled?" and "Why do questions arise in your hearts?" imply that if we really grasped the situation, we would not feel troubled! The message is that if our hearts are open, now that we realize that Jesus is alive, we don't have to deny our personal history and sins and omissions because as we locate our new life on the death and resurrection of Jesus, we can become new.