

4/15/2018

“The Presence and Proclamation of Christ”

Scripture: Luke 24:36-49; 1 Peter 3:15

Theme: Being people of the Resurrection (Christ’s) means being aware of his presence (and the difference it makes in our lives) and proclaiming/sharing his good news (as witnesses) of God’s loving and forgiving grace.

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” - 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

Mike Melideros of California shared in The Upper Room (4/11/18) . . .

“Before I came to faith in Christ, I was hopeless and without joy. I knew I did things that were wrong, but I was unable to see how life could be better. Then, I met some people at my high school who seemed to have something special. Their lives were different and meaningful. As I watched them, I realized they weren’t just happy but joyful. That was strange to me, yet, also very appealing. I asked them many questions and appreciated their kind responses. When people ask me how I became a Christian, I always point to the significant impact of those joyful Christians who demonstrated purposeful living in God’s presence. No matter the difficulties they faced in life, they truly praised God. They even thought it was important to share this reason with me, letting me know that the path of true life and everlasting joy can be found only in Jesus. I give thanks for their joyfulness that showed me the way to new life in Christ.

He prays . . . Dear God, you alone are our greatest joy. Thank you for giving us new life in Jesus Christ. Amen.

You may have heard the expression that Christians are “Easter People”. In fact, you may have heard it from me. What is meant is not that we believe in the Easter Bunny, although I have to admit that I still like chocolate covered eggs somewhat. :-)

What is meant by that expression is that we are people of the Resurrection – the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe and affirm that Jesus rose from death on the third day.

For some, it means to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as a profound, factual, and life-changing miracle.

For others, it means experiencing the presence of the living Christ here with us now, traveling beside us on the highways and byways of daily life.

Of course for me and for many others, it is both.

And that brings us to today’s theme:

† **Being people of the Resurrection (Christ’s) means being aware of his presence (and the difference it makes in our lives), and proclaiming/sharing his good news (as witnesses)**

of God's loving and forgiving grace.

Today's Gospel tells of something that happened on the evening of the first day of Christ's Resurrection. It comes immediately after the story of two disciples going from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They are trying to make sense of all that has happened, when Jesus appears and walks beside them. Jesus explains faith history, and by the end of the journey, as they sat at table, they recognize the presence of Jesus in the breaking of bread.

Last week we considered John's account of this event in Jerusalem that night. As Luke presents the story, some disciples have returned to Jerusalem to tell the news of what happened in Emmaus, and how Jesus "had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:35b).

In the midst of sharing this exciting story, Jesus appears among them and blesses them.

As Luke writes:

³⁶ *While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, (what?) -- "**Peace be with you.**"*

As they were quite frightened and confused, Jesus offers reassurance: "If you don't think it's really me, just look at my hands and feet. Touch me if you need proof."

As Luke says:

³⁷ *They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw (what?) – a ghost. He said to them, "**Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?** Look at my hands and my feet. **It is I myself!** Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."*

Significantly, Jesus does not force a belief in his physical presence upon them, but only invites them to accept that proof. What seems clear, however, is that Jesus wants them to know that he is fully in their midst; however they – and we – understand that.

The disciples respond by still disbelieving and marveling at his presence. And, with that Jesus casually asks for some food and eats it in front of them.

Then, explaining again the scriptures and his words of prophecy to them before his death, "he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

As Donald Schmidt has said, "According to this story, Jesus has come to explain the scriptures that told how the Messiah would suffer, die, and rise again. A huge stumbling block to faith at that time was the idea that the Messiah, the Christ, could suffer."

Schmidt adds, as I've said before, "many believed that, ultimately, Jesus would triumph over the Romans in the last act of his earthly story and bring about a revolution. As we all know, that did not happen." He goes on to say:

"But Jesus explains that it *will* happen. The kind of revolution of which he speaks is the same thing he spoke of while alive: not turning the world upside down with violence, but **turning the world right-side up by means of repentance and forgiveness.**"

As Schmidt notes still further, “Of all the things that Jesus could have emphasized from his ministry, it is intriguing that the focus here is on repentance (turning around and starting over) and forgiveness (experiencing God’s grace). **This message is to be proclaimed to all the nations**, not necessarily to convert the world to Christianity, but **to offer this wonderful new way of living to all people**. If all the world were to accept and practice the kind of repentance and forgiveness Jesus taught and modeled, just imagine where we could be.”!

The point of Easter, I believe Jesus is telling all of us who follow him, is presence and proclamation.

- † **We are invited to experience the presence of the risen Christ among us wherever we are:** in the Temple in Jerusalem or in our churches; on the road to Emmaus or wherever life might take us; in the celebration of Holy Communion or whenever we break bread with one another. We do not need to understand the mechanics of Christ’s presence, but we are invited to enjoy it, to bask in it, to be renewed and refreshed by it.
- † Beyond that, **we are challenged to proclaim the message of repentance and forgiveness** – we are called to be witnesses. Repentance is not about shame and guilt nearly so much as it is about the God-given opportunity to turn from old ways and embrace new ones.

The call to repentance is a call to examine who we are, where we have been, and what our agenda is, and then to offer it all to God, that we might be transformed. It involves giving up some of our cherished ideas and habits with the promise that we can start over again.

This in turn is enabled by the message of forgiveness – God’s forgiveness of us, and our forgiveness of others (just as Jesus taught us to pray).

Jesus then instructed his disciples to stay there in Jerusalem, until they had “been clothed with power from on high” – that is with the Holy Spirit which God the Father would send. Then, they would be empowered to fulfill the mission which Jesus gave them.

There may be times when we don’t feel fully prepared or empowered to fulfill the work Christ has given us to do. Gathering together each week or more often can enable us to feel Christ’s presence more nearly, to read and understand God’s word more clearly, to love and desire God more dearly.

And hopefully, as we feel empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can go back into the world to proclaim the life and joy of Jesus Christ to others – in our homes, our schools, our workplaces and communities – by our love as well as our words.

The disciples of Jesus experienced the presence of the risen Christ, although they were not quite ready to believe. Jesus challenged them to proclaim a message of repentance (starting again) and forgiveness (God’s grace) to all nations. We, too, are invited to experience Christ’s presence and proclaim Christ’s message.

How will you do that this week? How will you further seek to experience and proclaim the

risen Christ Jesus?

It could be as simple as reading your bible or devotional with someone else, reading or sending an email, text message, or sharing a witness of God's love and grace on Facebook or other social media. It may require walking across a room and striking up a conversation with a stranger or stopping to talk with someone on the street or store. Let the Holy Spirit guide you, and you will be amazed at what can happen!

It reminds me of a church mission outreach visit to City Team in Chester, PA a number of years ago. One of our members shared a message with the folks waiting to eat dinner as we worshiped for a short while, and invited them to visit our church. I closed with an invitation to pray with anyone while I was there. One person came up to me before going to eat, and several others came for prayer during or after their meal as I went and fellowshiped with them. One asked for help in finding a home for his family, another for a job, another for strength in dealing with alcoholism which was ruining his life again. I felt humbled and glad that God would use me to ask his blessing on his hurting children.

Being people of the Resurrection (Christ's) means being aware of his presence (and the difference it makes in our own lives) and proclaiming/sharing his good news (as witnesses) of God's loving and forgiving grace.

Experience and proclaim the life-giving message of the risen Christ!

For as we experience the presence of the risen Christ and proclaim new life in his name, the true and real message of Easter – of Christ's resurrection – is continued.

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia.

Pastoral Prayer

God of repentance and forgiveness, the message of the Christ's resurrection is exciting and challenging. Like the first disciples, we may struggle with the resurrection story and have difficulty understanding how Christ is with us. Yet in our hearts, we can know Christ's eternal presence – we need not understand or explain.

By your Holy Spirit, empower us to proclaim the Easter gospel to all nations. Help us to turn our lives around and to remind others that the God of Christ's resurrection is a God of second chances. Help us to experience and share the wondrous forgiveness that you offer us, that the world might be healed. In the name of the risen Christ we pray. Amen.

(Quotes and prayer from Donald Schmidt, Min. Annual Manual, 4/26/09, adapted)