

## Easter Sunday April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021

(Luke 24:1-49)

### • Finishing the Story

- The way Luke's Gospel tells the story of the resurrection is just amazing—it's breathtaking and hilarious. We're so close to the end that I want to finish his story here. This is what happens right after our reading left off, as the two disciples from the road to Emmaus are telling their story:
- Luke 24:36-49, "*While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw 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.' When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, 'Do you have anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. He said to 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.' Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, '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 am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'*" And that's Luke's story of the resurrection.
- It took them quite a while to grasp *everything* this meant: at first, they were just reeling from the shock, the joy, the amazement. A little like us, after a year of chaos and now finally coming back together, they were still reeling from the trauma of Good Friday and the emptiness of Holy Saturday. Joy, bewilderment—fear!—some of them didn't even recognize Jesus at first.
  - It wasn't until maybe two decades later that Paul would write, quoting the prophets, "*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?*" *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" It wasn't until they had time to let the reality sink in that Jesus' followers realized what it means the *he is alive*: it means that God wins, love wins. In this world of suffering and evil, we know that the Story ultimately has a *happy ending*. It means that our hope is in more than just wishful thinking and fairytales, but our hope is something *true* and *real*, as real as Christ's resurrected body standing in front of them. It means that, in the words of J.R.R. Tolkien, "Everything sad is coming untrue." It means that, at the return of Jesus we will see "the restoration of all things," and there is coming a day when *all things will be made new*: no more death, or mourning, or pandemics, or wars, or crying, or pain.
- But they couldn't process all that at first. They were just shocked.

### • Magic Eye

- Let me show you something: how many of you have seen one of these before? (*Picture of a "Magic Eye" optical illusion.*) For me, as a child of the 90's, it brings to mind every dentist office I've ever been to. Is there anyone born after 2000 who knows what these are? It's called a "Magic Eye," picture. The technical term is an "*autostereogram*."
- It's an optical illusion designed to make your brain see a 3-D image without using 3-D glasses. This one probably won't work because you're looking at it through a screen. But apparently, there's a 3-D shark hiding somewhere in there. When you stare at it right now, you probably just see a cacophony of random colors like an abstract painting. But if you could get your eyes to focus in the right way—you sort of *look through it*, like you're staring through a window—suddenly the 3-D image shows up, it pops out of the texture like a little hologram. It's really cool.
- The reason this works is that our eyes are about 2 and ½ inches apart and they see *slightly different* things: the visual data they're sending to our brain is coming from different angles, so our brain integrates it into one picture. It's called *stereoscopic vision* and it's what allows you to have depth perception. You can see this if you hold your finger close up: you see two fingers, and if you close one eye at a time, your finger jumps from one side to the other.

- Stereograms, Magic Eye pictures, use this and to make your brain see 3-D.
- The point is, *there are times when we fail to see something that's right in front of us, when people can look at the same thing, but see it in totally different ways.* We'll come back to that in the end.
- **The Road to Emmaus (and Back Again)**
  - Let's get back to the story we read with the disciples on the road. We hear about how the women found the empty tomb early in the morning, how Peter ran to check things out and found nothing but empty grave clothes, then the scene jumps and we're walking down the road with two disciples who are leaving Jerusalem to go to the village of Emmaus. They've had enough, the dream has died, and they're heading back to whatever they knew before Jesus.
    - They're talking about *everything* that happened over the weekend, trying to process the absolute catastrophe of the past 48 hours: their friend, teacher, would-be Messiah who did things no one else had done—was crucified, and as far as they knew, lying cold and lifeless in a dark tomb.
  - That's when it says that *Jesus* comes meandering up beside them. You know, the resurrected Christ, the one who supposedly conquered death and hell and sin, just trotting down the road like a fellow traveler. Here's the crazy part, it says literally, "*Their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*" They saw him, but they didn't see him. Well, that's interesting. *What* was preventing them from seeing Jesus? Was Jesus keeping his identity hidden? Did we want to mess with his buddies a little bit so we'd have the benefit of reading this story? Was it dark, or was the sun in their eyes, or did Jesus have his face covered by a hood? Was it the disciples' own minds, they were so settled on the fact that a dead, crucified Messiah could not possibly be the Messiah at all? All we can say to these questions is, yes. Any and all are possible answers.
  - Well, Jesus is trotting down the road with them and he asks them, "What's this you guys talking about?" They stop in the road with their heads hung: "Are you the only one in all Jerusalem who does not know the things that happened here?" (Remember, there were lots of pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem that weekend because of the Passover celebration.) And get this, Jesus just says, "*What things?*" (These are his things, these are the things that happened *to him!*)
    - And then they proceed to explain to Jesus, not knowing it *is* Jesus, what happened to him. "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."
  - Jesus says to these friends, "You thickheads! So slow to believe all the prophets have spoken!" And as they continue walking, he explains to them, "What was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself," from Moses to the Prophets and all the writings of the Hebrew Bible that we call the Old Testament. He says it's all about the Messiah, about *him*.
    - He must have been talking for a while, because next thing we know, they approach Emmaus, and here goes Jesus again, *he acts like he's going to keep walking*—like, "*Well, nice talking to you, maybe I'll run into you next Passover, Shalom!*" But they *beg him* to stay, and Jesus is like, "*Oh alright, if you insist.*" They wash up and sit down for supper. And here we go: Jesus takes the bread, gives thanks, breaks it and begins to give it to them (sound familiar?). It's in that moment—just like he had three nights before in the upper room—it's in *that moment* when, "their eyes were opened and they recognized him"—and then, *he disappears from their sight!* Weird.
    - They're left sitting alone, staring in amazement, "*Were not our hearts burning with in us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*" And this is that moment in the movie where the pace quickens and the intense music kicks in and now the disciples are hustling *back* to Jerusalem as fast as they can to tell everyone, not knowing Jesus has already appeared to Peter and is about to show up to the whole gang.
- **How to See**
  - It's a great story, it's really entertaining! But do we do with it? These two disciples couldn't see it was Jesus when he was right in front of them. And then, suddenly, their eyes are opened, and they're looking at the same thing, but they're seeing it in a *totally different way*.
  - Here's the truth: we're sitting here 2,000 years after Jesus' first disciples claimed that he really *rose from the dead*. People all over the world are still *looking at the same thing* and *seeing it completely different ways*. I'm guessing that 99.9% of us at least *know what Easter is about*.

- At the very least, you've heard about Jesus: how people believe he's the Son of God who died to save the world and rose from the grave. That's what we celebrate on Easter.
- Maybe you know the story, you've "seen" this movie before, but you still don't see Jesus the way others see him. There are things *preventing your eyes from seeing him* like that. There are questions, doubts, wounds, and misgivings that keep you from seeing him that way, and so here you sit in one more Easter service because someone asked you to come and you're looking at that the same story as everyone else, but you're not really *seeing* it like others see it. (The "shark" isn't popping out for you. Sorry, I couldn't resist.) And maybe that's where you want to stay—maybe you don't want the picture to "pop," maybe you don't want Jesus to show up and freak you out and turn your world upside down—that's understandable, that's fair enough.
- For some of us, you think you can see Jesus well enough: you've been coming to worship year after year, at least on holidays, to sing the songs and hear the old Story, and you believe. But after all this time, the earth-shaking reality of the resurrection of the Son of God hasn't really made any difference in who you are, or what you think, or how you live. And every once in a while, you wonder what it would be like to have "your heart burning within you," with the words of Christ, and you wonder if you've really *seen* Jesus for all he is.
- And for others of us, you're pretty sure you have seen Jesus and it has rocked your world, but you're still standing around bewildered like those disciples wondering, *what in the world does this mean? What in the world do I do with this now?*
- How is it that we learn to see what we can't seem to be able see? Well, I can't make you see. I don't know what's preventing you from seeing, if anything. And it's not like a Magic Eye picture that you can learn how to see with enough training of the eyes. It's a work of God's Spirit. No one can predict when Jesus will show up and walk through your walls and open your eyes. But here are some things that happen in this story that might help you journey forward, if you want to:
  - Before their eyes were opened to actually see Jesus, these disciples did a few things: they were *intrigued by Jesus*, they *walked with Jesus*, they *listened to Jesus*, and they *invited Jesus in*.
  - If you find yourself *intrigued* by the Story of Jesus and his resurrection, that's a great place to start. Is there something about Christ, his life, his teachings, his story that you find compelling? Is there a part of you that really wants to see if this is true? Just start walking with Jesus. It might seem counter-intuitive, but you can't really believe and trust in Jesus if you don't *walk with* him first. So, just start to...walk with him. Or better, let him walk with you. Explore with him. See where it might lead. And if you start walking with Jesus, learning more about his story, you can start listening to him. Hear what he has to say about your life and about the world. See if you find it in your heart to listen to what he says and maybe even put it into practice.
  - And if you do that long enough, you'll find the opportunity will come *to let him in*. To become vulnerable, to open up your heart. In Revelation Jesus says, "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.*" Sometimes, it seems to happen all at once. Other times it's very gradual: but if you become curious about Jesus, walk with Jesus, listen to Jesus, and eventually *let him in*, sooner or later, you will **see** Jesus the way they saw him.
  - Many of us are here right now because some time, somehow, he came in through our walls and got in through our locked doors—and we *saw Jesus* for who he is. Whatever it was that was preventing you from seeing will melt away and you'll see him, for the first time, or like it's the first time all over again, *and you'll never be the same*. If he really is alive, it changes everything.
- **Communion**
  - And now, coincidentally, we have the chance like those disciples to come together and *break bread* in remembrance of him. Maybe, just maybe, someone will see Jesus here today. *Oh God, open our eyes. Let us see Jesus anew in the breaking of the bread today.*