

The 3rd Sunday of Easter
April 18, 2021

The Lessons: Acts 3:11-12
 Psalm 4
 1 John 3:1-7
 Luke 24:36-49

The Hymns: # 467 (1,2,5) *Awake, My Heart, with Gladness*
 # 831 (1,2,5) *"How Shall They Hear," Who Have Not Heard*
 # 465 (1-4) *Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds*

The Collect: O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

The Sermon:
God's Story and Your Story
Luke 24:36-49

"Then [Jesus] said to them, 'These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem.'" This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

I enjoy reading, and, like many people, I have mixed feelings when I see that there are only a few pages left in a good book. On the one hand, it's always rewarding when a good story has a satisfying ending. On the other hand, if I've bought into the characters and plot, there are times when I don't want the story to end. I want it to keep going.

When our Gospel lesson concludes today, there are only four verses left in the Gospel according to St. Luke. Things are wrapping up. Except for Jesus' ascension into heaven, this is the conclusion to the book. This is how the story that began 24 chapters before comes to an end.

At least, many see it that way. But it's not so. This story isn't over yet. Not by a long shot.

I. The Big Picture

The disciples don't see the big picture or the whole story on the evening after the resurrection. They don't see much of anything at all. They're locked in a room out of fear, and we can throw in a fair amount of confusion, too. They should know better because they've heard better. They haven't seen

the risen Lord yet, but Jesus has sent the women to them with the angel's announcement that He's risen from the dead. He's gotten Peter and John to see the empty tomb, and He's even appeared to Peter. Most recently, He's gotten the two men from Emmaus to run back to Jerusalem to tell them that they've just seen—and even eaten with—the Lord.

Then Jesus Himself is there. He shows them His hands and His side. He eats to demonstrate His body is real. But even better than the sight are the words that He speaks.

He says, "Peace to you!" It's a word of absolution: to doubting, fearful, less-than-faithful-or-courageous disciples, Jesus says, "You're at peace with God. There is no sin left to make you His enemy or to bring His judgment down upon you. You're at peace with God because I've taken all of that sin away."

They're at peace with God because Jesus is at peace with them. Jesus says 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." That's good English, but it's not quite what Jesus says. He doesn't say, "It is I." He says, "I am." The risen Lord declares that He is the Lord of the Old Testament—He is no less and none other than Yahweh. The great I AM who defeated Pharaoh and brought Israel to the Promised Land has now conquered the grave so that He might bring His people to heaven. When He says, "Peace to you!" He is saying, "God is at peace with you because I am God and I AM at peace with you."

Then Jesus says, "These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

That's important, too: His life as the Word-made-flesh is not a separate story. It's part of the whole story, the big picture. Salvation has been God's plan for man since before the beginning.

It's been said that every movie plot more or less comes down to "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back;" except for musicals, where the plot becomes "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy sings song and gets girl back." The Scriptures have a similar progression on an epic scale, because the Bible is the story of Christ's love for His runaway bride, the Church: thus, it's boy creates girl, boy loses girl, boy dies for girl and rises again to get girl back. That's the story that spans the Bible: as Jesus says here, He's found throughout the Old Testament in the books of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.

He's certainly found in the books of Moses: after all, what's the first thing the Lord said when Adam and Eve fell into sin? He promised that the Seed of the woman—the Christ—would crush the devil's head. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived with the assurance that through their line all nations would be blessed by the Messiah. Jesus was foreshadowed by the Passover Lamb, the Exodus, the tabernacle, the rock which gave water from its stricken side and the bronze serpent. The Law declared the need for holiness before God, and the necessity of sacrifice to be made holy. And before Moses died, the Lord declared that He would raise up another prophet like Moses: not necessarily just raise Him up to prominence, but raise Him up from the dead.

The Prophets picked up the message, warning the people of God—the wayward daughter of Zion—that they had departed from the Lord's Word and rejected His mercy and protection. They called them to repentance, and proclaimed the Lord's faithfulness. The prophet Isaiah declared that the Messiah would come, born of a virgin; that He would be stricken by man and afflicted by God for their

sins; and he would shout out, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your salvation comes; behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before him.’ And they shall be called The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken” (Isaiah 62:11-12). The prophet Jonah would foreshadow His death and resurrection with the aid of a great fish, Micah would add that He would be born in the little town of Bethlehem, and Zechariah said He would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, righteous and having salvation.

And the Psalms? It is in the psalms that the people of the Old Testament sang of Jesus while they waited for Him. “The Lord said to Me, ‘You are My Son: today I have begotten You,” they sang in Psalm 2. “Zeal for Your house has consumed Me,” they sang in Psalm 69, for Jesus would come and cleanse the temple. Because He would die for their sins, they sang “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” in Psalm 22; and they would sing of the resurrection in Psalm 118: “I shall not die, but live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.”

The entire Old Testament told the story—the story of the Lord’s pursuit of His faithless people, of His unfolding plan to save them. So when He appeared to His disciples, He showed them how the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms all pointed to Him. One can only imagine how stunning it was when He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures—when they finally saw the big picture, when they finally saw that the Old Testament proclaimed salvation in Jesus time and time again.

We pray that the Lord would thus open our minds to understand the Scriptures and constantly to see our Lord, for such a view is not common within Christianity today. For many, salvation through Jesus Christ is just one era, one dispensation, not the central theme of the Bible. It’s one chapter among many messages. In such an understanding, one of two things happens. Perhaps the Old Testament is simply neglected because it’s considered irrelevant. Or perhaps the Old Testament is seen as a book of other subject matters: in that case, the Law of God is seen as good advice. The moral of the story of Jonah is then to make the most of your second chances, and the lesson of the bronze serpent is that you should keep looking up when times are tough. The story of David and Goliath then means that you need to confront your giants and slay them, too. In the same vein, the point of the psalms is not a proclamation of Christ and His mercy, but examples of how we feel when things aren’t going our way.

All of this distorts the big picture and loses the truth of the story. It makes the message of the Old Testament about what we ought to be doing, not God’s faithfulness in Christ throughout time. In doing so, it disrupts the story of your salvation and makes it seem smaller—a part of the plan rather than the reason for history. And make no mistake: this is the story of your salvation. It doesn’t begin at the first chapter of Luke, but before the foundation of the world in Genesis 1. It doesn’t end with the end of Luke 24. Instead, it keeps going. Here in our text, Jesus tells the apostles that the next chapter is about to begin. **They** are going to tell the story—what they’ve seen and heard, and they’re going to speak it to all nations. They are going to declare that repentance and forgiveness are available in Christ—that in Him there’s certain hope of eternal life. This story won’t just be a great story of old, but one that continues to be written even after the Scriptures are closed. It keeps going. It keeps going now. It keeps saving now. You, in fact, have a place in the story.

2. Your Place in the Story

I’ve been with you for a few years now, and I’ve gotten to know you quite well. I find your stories fascinating. You may not— you’re quite used to them and know them very well and might consider

your life rather humdrum. But this is quite a collection of the people of God, and how you all got here to Redeemer Lutheran Church and ended up as the family of God in this place can be very interesting.

But it's not just where you're from or how you got here, but what's happened along the way. You have your triumphs and your scars. You've got the times when you were hanging by a thread. Some of you shouldn't be here at all: it's truly a miracle that you're still around for us to get to know you. Most of you have got some serious things that you worry about: family, health, finances, jobs, bad decisions, grief and more. Some of you are in situations of life thinking, "How did I get into this, and will I ever get out of it?" Some may be thinking, "Why is the pastor singling me out right now?" The answer is that I'm not: this is the family of God, and there are plenty of burdens to be borne.

So here you are; and 2000 years after Christ's death and resurrection, what does that story have to do with you? Simple: you're part of it—you are characters that the Lord has woven into His story of redemption. Before His ascension, the Lord sent His apostles to proclaim repentance and forgiveness to all nations, and you can read of the start of that in the book of Acts. The apostles fanned out from Jerusalem, south into Africa and northwest into Asia and Europe. They proclaimed Christ and His salvation. Some who heard believed. They repented of their sin and they rejoiced in forgiveness—in peace with God. They still suffered. They suffered hunger and sickness. They watched families fall apart, kids rebel, spouses cheat and parents abandon. They saw loved ones die—sometimes from disease or war, sometimes from persecution. But they also knew that their lives on earth were a brief chapter in a sinful world, and that Christ would raise them up to everlasting life, because He was risen from the dead. So they lived lives of repentance, for repentance is to live a life that shuns deadly sin and clings to the living Savior. They lived lives of forgiveness, knowing that God loved them despite their trials here— knowing that God did not hold their sins against them for the sake of Jesus. And they knew they were not alone: as they gathered to hear the Word of God, they knew that Christ was with them. As they gathered for the Supper, they knew that the Lord Jesus Himself was there as the host of the meal, giving them His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

Of the saints of God who have gone before us, all but a very few are forgotten and lost to history. But Hebrews says that the world was not worthy of them, and the Lord has not forgotten them. He gives them life even now.

Somewhere along the way, that news of repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus made it into your ears. It is an awesome miracle that Christ's command to preach the Gospel in our text has spanned the world and twenty centuries and brought you to the faith. Your contribution to world history may be minimal, but you know this for sure: you're a child of God for the sake of Jesus. Because you're clothed in His righteousness, the world is not worthy of you. And God will not forget you.

You're part of the story. Christianity is not about you asking, "What can I learn from what happened way back then?" The Gospel is not another ancient morality tale so that you can better take charge of your life. It's not an inspiration example that promises an easy life if you follow it. It's redemption from sin and death. The Lord Jesus who died and rose and appeared to His disciples has gathered you in by His Word. He's promised His everlasting faithfulness to you. He calls you by His Word, warning of sin and showering you with forgiveness; by His grace, you turn from sin and you trust in Him. He feeds

you with His own body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, and so you heed His voice, confess your sin and feast on His grace.

In other words, **you** live a life of repentance and forgiveness, too.

So the story continues, and your chapter goes on. You laugh. You grieve. You rejoice. You ache. You worry and regret. You succeed and fail. So life goes in this dying, but not God-forsaken, world. Do not despair. Yours is not a life of insignificance, because the Creator of heaven and earth knows your name. Yours is not a life of hopelessness, because you live by the One who has conquered death. You're part of the story of Christ's redemption for the world, and Christ Himself has promised to you, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Even then, when this age ends for you, the story goes on. Your story goes on—you're not a character written out of the script; for whether we live or die, we are the Lord's—and He is the Lord of the living. No, when this age ends for you, that end is just the beginning: because you are forgiven for all of your sins. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.