

Third Sunday of Easter

April 14, 2024

QUESNEL

“Witnesses: From Jerusalem to Worms to Canada” (Luke 24:36-49)

The disciples were in Jerusalem.

- They think that Jesus, their master,
 - is dead and buried.
 - Then suddenly Jesus is standing there in the room,
 - and they don't know what to think:
 - “Is that really him?”
 - Are we imagining this?
 - Is that his ghost?
 - What's going on here?”
 - Then Jesus speaks:
 - “Why are you confused?”
 - Did not I tell you
 - I would rise on the third day?
 - Well, here I am.
 - So you think I'm a ghost, do you?
- Look, see my hands and my feet.
 - See the nail marks there.
 - Yes, it really is me.
 - You can touch me and see
 - that I'm no ghost.
 - I have got flesh and bone,
 - just like you do.”

Yes, Jesus really is risen from the dead.

- Physically, bodily, risen.
 - No ghost.
 - No hallucination.
 - The disciples are a little slow on the uptake,
 - but if this is true,
 - what a marvelous thing this is!

Jesus has more to say to them.

- He says that everything He had told them during his ministry
 - even predicting His passion and His resurrection
 - that this fulfills everything written about Him
 - in the Scriptures.
- They had not gotten it up to this point,
 - but now they will.
 - Jesus opens their minds to understand the Scriptures.
 - And here is what he tells them to sum it all up:
- “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 from Jerusalem.”

Brothers and sisters,

- do you want to know what the Bible is all about?
 - Do you want to know what life is all about?
 - It is right here.
 - It is all about Jesus,
 - who He is
 - and what He has done for us
 - and what this means for our lives.
- Jesus is the fulfillment of Holy Scripture.
 - God’s plan for the ages,
 - for this cosmos and all of humanity
 - it all comes to fruition in Christ.
- Jesus, the Son of God in the flesh,
 - accomplishes God’s plan to redeem
 - and restore sinful mankind.
 - What was lost in the garden
 - is regained in the cross and the empty tomb.

All the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament

- find their focus and fulfillment in Christ:
 - The seed of the woman,
 - who would stomp on the serpent’s head.
 - The seed of Abraham,

- in whom all the families of the earth
 - would be blessed.
- The son of David, the Messiah,
 - who would usher in an everlasting kingdom of blessing
 - all these promises of God find their “Yes and Amen!” in Jesus.

Jesus’ death on the cross was not a defeat.

- It was not a disappointment
 - or detour from the plan.
 - No, it was the plan!
 - The Suffering Servant foretold by Isaiah,
 - the righteous one who would suffer for the sins of the people
 - and be their healing
 - it’s Jesus.
- Now it’s all starting to come together.
 - It was there in the Bible all along,
 - but now their minds are being opened to understand it all.
- Without God opening our minds to understand the Scriptures,
 - the Bible remains a closed book.
 - But when God does open our minds,
 - and gives us the key in knowing Christ as our Saviour,
 - then the Bible becomes God’s book of life for us.

His own suffering, death, and resurrection

- that is part of what Jesus says
 - is written in the Scriptures.
 - And then he adds something else:
 - “and that repentance and forgiveness of sins
 - should be proclaimed in His name to all nations.”
- You see, this is how Christ’s work for us is applied to us:
 - through preaching in His name.
 - And what is preached is repentance and forgiveness.
 - What this means for our lives is that we repent of our sins
 - and receive the forgiveness Christ has for us.
- Repentance means that we acknowledge
 - that we are indeed sinners,
 - desperately in need of God’s forgiveness.
 - Otherwise, we would be lost forever.
- We have broken God’s commandments,

- and there is nothing we can do to make up for that.
 - Forgiveness means that God has had mercy on us,
 - that our sins are not held against us,
 - because of what God’s Son Jesus did on the cross,
 - shedding His holy blood for us.

And who will do this preaching of Christ crucified and risen,

- of repentance and forgiveness in His name?
 - Jesus tells His disciples:
 - “You are witnesses of these things.”
 - “You, my disciples, you will do this preaching.
 - You will be my witnesses.
- You will testify to what you have seen
 - and heard
 - and know to be the truth.
 - I am sending you out for this very purpose.
 - I will establish my church
 - on the basis of this proclamation,
 - and it will go out to all nations,
 - beginning from Jerusalem.”

And that is exactly what happened.

- Beginning from Jerusalem,
 - the apostles bore witness to Christ
 - and preached what Jesus here told them to preach.
 - Peter on the Day of Pentecost:
- “This Jesus, whom you crucified,
 - God raised from the dead,
 - and of this we all are witnesses.
 - Repent and be baptized
 - for the forgiveness of your sins.”

“You are witnesses of these things.”

- And that can involve some danger, some risk.
 - The people to whom you are bearing witness
 - may not like what you are saying.
 - Again, Peter, in Jerusalem, testifying before the Sanhedrin:
 - “This Jesus, whom you rejected
 - there is salvation in no one else,

- for there is no other name under heaven
 - given among men
 - by which we must be saved.”
- A bold confession of faith,
 - at a real point of risk and danger!

And it did not stop at Jerusalem in the first century.

- The church’s witness and bold confession of the faith continued.
 - Next stop:
 - Worms, a city in Germany in the 16th century.
 - Emperor Charles V,
 - the head of the Holy Roman Empire,
 - has called together a diet there,
- “diet” meaning an official imperial meeting,
 - with the princes and rulers
 - of the various territories present.
- To this Diet of Worms,
 - the emperor has summoned a professor
 - from the University of Wittenberg.
 - His name is Martin Luther.
 - The reason the emperor has ordered him to appear
 - is because this Luther
 - has been causing quite a ruckus
 - over the past few years,
 - challenging and denouncing the papacy
 - and the Roman church in his writings.
 - The emperor wants him to publicly take back
 - what he has said and written.
- Luther, though, is hoping to have an opportunity
 - to explain his reasons for writing these things.
 - So the pressure is on.
 - The tension could not be any higher.

And there was real risk here.

- A century earlier,
 - a reformer named John Hus
 - had been burned at the stake
 - for challenging the Roman church.
- What would happen to Luther?

- Sure, the emperor had promised him safe conduct,
 - but what if he changes his mind?

So Luther, this little monk and professor,

- is standing before Emperor Charles V,
 - the most powerful man in the world.
- Luther is asked two questions:
 - 1) Are these your writings?
 - There is a pile of his books and treatises lying on a table.
 - And question 2)
 - Will you or will you not retract what you have written?
 - Luther was hoping for a discussion of the issues.
 - Instead, he is limited to simply giving answers
 - to the two questions.

First answer: “Yes, these are my writings.”

- But then the second question,
 - Will you or will you not recant?
 - Luther’s answer came on a date,
 - April 18, 1521, 503 years ago this week:
 - “You ask for a simple answer. Here it is:
- “Unless you can convince me by Scripture,
 - and not by popes or councils,
 - who have often contradicted each other,
 - unless I am so convinced that I am wrong,
 - I am bound to my beliefs
 - by the texts of the Bible.
 - My conscience is captive to the Word of God.
- To go against conscience is neither right nor safe.
 - Therefore, I cannot and I will not recant.
 - Here I stand.
 - I can do no other.
 - God help me.
 - Amen.”

Friends, this is a bold confession!

- Placed under enormous pressure,
 - faced with real danger,
 - Luther made the good confession.

- Why was it good?
 - What gave him this courage?
 - He said it:
 - “My conscience is captive to the Word of God.”
 - It was the Word of God,
 - the gospel word
 - this was the only thing that gave peace
 - to Luther’s troubled conscience.
- This gospel word told him of a Saviour
 - who forgives sins and gives eternal life
 - to those who trust in him.
 - So how could he recant that?
 - He could not.
- God’s Word is more powerful
 - than all the emperors and popes and councils
 - who have come down through history.
 - You may burn me at the stake,
 - but you cannot take my salvation from me.
 - Here I stand. I can do no other.

“You are witnesses of these things.”

- The apostles were those witnesses in Jerusalem.
 - Luther was such a witness at Worms.
 - And now what will we do here in Canada?
 - Friends, the risk is real here in our country,
 - in these days.
- Cancel culture
 - would like to cancel out the church’s witness.
 - The world does not like to hear
 - that this or that favorite sin of theirs
 - is really sin.
- But we are called to preach repentance.
 - And so when the church speaks the truth,
 - our society will try to make us apologize
 - and take it all back.
- Instead of “Here I stand,”
 - they want us to say, “Here I give in.”
 - So which will it be?

It is not that we think we are superior or without sin ourselves.

- No, that is not it.
 - But Jesus has told us to preach repentance,
 - so that people will then be ready
 - to hear the gospel of forgiveness.
- If people do not think they are sinners,
 - they are not going to feel much need for a Saviour.
 - But a Saviour
 - this Saviour,
 - Jesus Christ
 - is exactly what we have.
- This is the Saviour you have.
 - He gives real peace to your conscience,
 - the peace and forgiveness and eternal life
 - He won for you by His death and resurrection.
 - “You are witnesses of these things,”
 - Jesus tells His church.
- Yes, we are his “Witnesses:
 - From Jerusalem to Worms to Canada.”
 - Here we stand.
 - We can do no other.
 - God help us.
 - Amen