

“Look”

Luke 24:36-48

“*While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them.....*” (v. 36). I wonder if we realize that far from being an isolated incident, this kind of thing happens all the time. Former President of Fuller Seminary, Richard Mouw once said that as children, we’re told by adults to watch our language when we are “in polite company.” Richard goes on to note, a key reason why Christian people discipline themselves to guard their lips and monitor their speech is because of our Christian belief that when it comes right down to it, we are *always* in polite company. As Paul puts it in Philippians 4, “*The Lord is near.*” Yes, he is!

The truth is that every time we get together in this place—whether excitedly or with a hint of boredom in our voices—every time we get together to talk about Jesus, to debate biblical truths, or to hear a sermon, Jesus always comes and stands in our midst, even if we don’t hear him greet us as he did the disciples with: “*Peace be with you.*” We can never merely talk *about* God or Christ or the Holy Spirit without knowing we are speaking in their presence as well.

This can lead some people to envision spooky Big Brother kind of scenarios. But Psalm 139 reminds us God knows us right well from top to bottom and at every moment of our lives. In fact, the psalm claims that God knows us better than we know ourselves! But the good news is that God is the One who can be trusted with such comprehensive knowledge. God is a loving God, not a tyrannical despot who will use what we say against us.

Still, some find it startling to think that when we speak of Jesus, he is *always* standing right in the midst of us, whether we notice him or not. And like the disciples, there may be times when, upon realizing this, we too are startled and frightened by his presence. But maybe remembering that we live all of life in the presence of Christ—through the Holy Spirit—will have a humbling effect on us in terms of what we say about Jesus. At the very least we’re reminded that when we talk about spiritual things, we are never merely engaging in idle

chit-chat. At the end of the day, we are not only talking about ideas, but about a *Person*, about a *living* Person, and about a *very personal* God.

That is a key take away from the Easter resurrection story that consumes Luke 24. If we believe what we celebrate as the foundational truth of the Christian faith, then we must believe that *Jesus lives*. And if we don't like going as far as the lyrics of the old song that says Jesus "walks with us along life's narrow way," even so, we do believe he is alive and is alive as a real person and, through the Holy Spirit, as a real personal presence in our lives.

The Christian church made clear long ago that our faith is not foremost about ideas alone. We're not Gnostics seeking to be saved through special knowledge. We're not Mystics who believe that the key to spirituality is to find ways to transcend this world's physicality to drift into realms of pure thought and consciousness. No, our faith is gritty and fleshy and tangible and involves the Risen Lord standing before his nervous disciples as he says, "*Look!*" "*Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see...*" See what? Not only nail prints, but nothing short of the renewal of all things, all creation, all lakes, mountains, tadpoles, tangerines, all real human bodies. Today Luke's gospel reminds us that we need to "*Look Again*" because Jesus is always present when we talk about him and at the end of the day, we wouldn't want it any other way.

In verse 44 Jesus uses the Scriptures to "*open their minds so they could understand.*" He says, "*Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.*" That statement is the most comprehensive reference to the three major divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures in all the New Testament. This is the only place where the Scriptures we call the Old Testament are summarized not just as the Law and Prophets, but also the Psalms. Although there is a time or two when a specific psalm is mentioned (like Jesus referring to Psalm 110 in Luke 20), taken together, this is the triple name used as shorthand for the totality of Hebrew Scripture. Jesus was indeed saying to the disciples on the eve of that first Easter day that his resurrection

fulfills not just an individual passage or set of passages, but the entirety of all God's revelation to humanity. Christ is making a sweeping claim that the whole Bible, from beginning to end, *is about him!*

Jesus was now walking the earth as its resurrected Lord and King. Yet Luke (a talented narrator of gripping and good stories if ever there was one in the Bible) finds just a few choice tales worth telling. What we get is the revelation that the resurrected Jesus not only *opened* his hands to show his frightened disciples his scars, but he also *opened* the disciples' minds so they could finally connect the dots and discover that all of Scripture as they knew it found its "Yes" in Jesus. Jesus is the Rosetta Stone of Scripture (if not of all reality) if you know who he really is. You see how within his own person and ministry and his resurrected presence, every thread, every strand, every story, every promise, every prophecy winds its way straight to him.

Apparently, that is exactly what the disciples need to know. All that remains is for them to receive the power that will not only solidify all that Jesus said and did but will give them the boldness to proclaim the truth of Jesus to the whole world. That power, in the form of the Holy Spirit, would eventually come, but in the meanwhile what Jesus revealed to the disciples on that first Easter evening was apparently the number one thing that had to happen after his resurrection. Once Luke conveys this, the forty days are over, and Luke concludes his Gospel with a few lines about Jesus' ascension to heaven.

Everything that needed to be shown and told and taught had already taken place in Jesus' ministry as narrated in Luke's Gospel up to this point. All that remains is for the disciples to understand how all that they had experienced in Jesus' presence represented nothing short of cosmic history coming to its zenith. The meaning of the past, the hope for the present, and the content of the future is all contained in the resurrected Lord Jesus. If they understand *this* (no small thing to wrap your brain around), there was really nothing more for Jesus to say or do.

I'll agree that it's wonderful and amazing to hear that Jesus popped out of thin air to be with the disciples that evening. And yes, it's curious to see Jesus put a piece of broiled fish into his mouth to prove he was a physical being and not a ghostly apparition. And yet the import and impact of what happens in this short account is stunning. Think about it! What this means is that we too, as followers of Jesus, are charged with grasping how all things come together in Jesus Christ. By the way, in response to the gospel, today we will affirm the "supremacy" of the Son of God by repeating Colossians 1:15-23, which is Paul's breathtaking summary of this gospel truth. So often—especially in our soundbite era—we tend to reduce the Christian faith and our faith practices to slogans, bumper stickers, four spiritual laws, forty days of purpose, or seven basic principles of this or that. But the story is so much bigger than this. Jesus isn't just our chum, our pal, our mentor, or even just our personal instructor in important life lessons.

Jesus is Lord. Jesus is King. And the reason he is King and Lord and is even now "*seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty*" (as we say in the Creed) is because everything there is to know about the universe comes together in him. Yes, that is a big outrageous claim. It was a big outrageous claim when Jesus first made it on that first Easter evening as reported in Luke 24 and it is certainly a big outrageous claim given what we now know about the size and the age and the complexity of the universe.

The miracle of Easter, the power of the Resurrection, who Jesus is and what he means for the universe—these are not small, intramural topics that we can easily comprehend or wrap our minds around in an instant. These are jaw-dropping considerations that elicit wonder and an enthusiasm to probe all of those Scriptures that bear witness to Jesus. This brief passage from Luke 24 reminds us that there can be no substitute for the genuine article of *opening* the Scriptures, reading, studying, pondering, and understanding them and how they come together in Christ the Lord and King. This is all serious stuff. In Luke 24, Christ *opens* God's word to the disciples and also *opens* their minds, giving

them clarity about who he is and what the Scriptures reveal as well as the capacity to comprehend it all.

Reformed theologian Neal Plantinga tells a story of something he experienced while talking to a man on death row at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana. Neal talked to an African American man wearing wire-rimmed glasses. The spectacles gave this convicted murderer what Plantinga called “a professorial air.” Neal asked him how he passed his days there in prison. The man picked up his NIV Bible from his bedside stand and said, “I read this, ‘Our Book.’ You know, sometimes I realize that on any given day or across any given time, most everything good that happens or is said in this world somehow comes from this, ‘Our Book.’ The truth of the whole world and everything that happens in this world somehow is in here, and I get to have a copy of all that right here in my cell. Isn’t that something? I just know I will never get to the bottom of it.”

Too often in the church, we have a far too low opinion of just what it is we have in this thing called the Bible— ‘Our Book.’ I had a seminary professor at Princeton who loved the gospel story of the two disciples who met Jesus on the Road to Emmaus, also in Luke 24. He loved it so much that he wrote a book that he titled, *The Transforming Moment*. He wrote about how two of Jesus’ followers were kept from recognizing him as they walked with him on the road. But the moment came when their eyes were *opened*, and they recognized Jesus.

When these two joined the other disciples in Jerusalem, Jesus stood among them and said, “*Look at my hands and my feet...Touch me and see.*” Of course, that was a transforming moment for the rest of the disciples. Likewise, Jesus says to us, “*Look at my hands and feet...Touch me and see me.*” What can we see? The risen Lord supplies spiritual sight and spiritual power to his people, so that all of us can understand God’s word and respond by carrying out Christ’s commission.

*“Lord, let Your light, light of Your face, shine on us.” Amen.*