

Sermon for Easter 3

Luke 24:36-49

April 26, 2009

Your annual salary has just doubled. The value of your 401 K has quadrupled. How would you react if a credible source informed you of these truths? You would be stunned. Can it be true? Is it possible? No, you've got to be kidding. You would have what some might call joyful disbelief. It's just too good to be true.

On Tuesday I went to Tolley to attend the funeral of a former parishioner. No one knew that I was going to be there. It was interesting to see the looks on the faces of people as they made eye contact with me. It was a look that said, "Is that really you?" Then a smile crossed their faces. "Oh, it is you. We didn't expect to see you here." Since I live only 150 miles from Tolley, it's not a huge stretch for me to show up unannounced. It brings some element of surprise. However, it's not something that is unbelievable.

Now imagine that you have just gone through the process of bidding farewell to a loved one. You attended their funeral. You were at the cemetery for the committal service. You sent the thank you cards and are coming to grips with your loss. How do you think you would respond if you were at Applebees and that loved one came and sat in the booth with you? Can it be true? You didn't expect to see them again until the Lord called you to heaven. You can't believe it. It's not possible, is it?

That is exactly what the disciples experienced. Even though He had told them that He would rise after three days, they didn't understand. They were stunned to see Jesus come into their presence. It was too good to be true. They were in a state of joyful disbelief.

The setting for this appearance was after Jesus had walked with the two Emmaus disciples. They were kept from recognizing Him as He talked with them along their way. It was in the breaking of the bread that their eyes were open and they recognized that this was Jesus. “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (24:32). They immediately headed back the seven or so miles and walked to Jerusalem to find the disciples. They announced that the Lord has risen from the dead. They told what had happened on the way and how He was recognized through the breaking of bread. That’s where the text for today picks it up.

While they were still talking about this, Jesus Himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

The disciples thought they had seen a ghost. They couldn’t believe their eyes. Jesus had come to demonstrate that He really was alive... in the flesh. “**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.**” (39) In an effort to demonstrate that it was really Him, He asked if they had anything to eat. They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. A ghost would certainly not be able eat a piece of fish. This was Christ in the flesh. He was truly alive. Unbelievable!

There are unbelievable things that happen in our lives. They aren’t all joyously unbelievable. Many of them are sadly and tragically unbelievable. One word descriptions bring to mind horrifying images. Ground Zero and Columbine are words now associated with hatred and chaos and terror. In a word, it is **lawlessness**.

A young father is devastated as he receives notice that his position is being eliminated. The family will have to relocate to another city in hopes of finding gainful employment so that he can provide for his family. Devastated, he can’t believe it. Every day we hear tragic accounts that are unbelievable. People carry out acts of hatred toward others.

Denise and I went for a walk in our development yesterday afternoon. Along the way we met a neighbor whom we had met only once. During the 40 minutes that we visited in the middle of the road, she bore her heart to us. This mother of teens told of the pain she experienced growing up in an abusive household. She was physically abused by adults who were supposed to protect her. Her parents eventually divorced. To cope with the pain of abuse she had turned to drugs, alcohol, and promiscuous sex. She married a man who came from similar circumstances. She saw the dangerous pattern of abuse and pain seeping into her family. She sought help. She and her husband nearly divorced. She has found her voice. She has been all but ostracized from her husband's family because she was willing to speak up and hold others accountable. It is a daily struggle for her to be strong, to put aside the put-downs so that she can celebrate that she is a child of God. She told us how Christ has brought healing and strength to her life. Only Christ can help a person who is hurting so deeply to pray for and to forgive her abusers. Sin and lawlessness are prevalent in so many hurting families.

We cause hurt to others as well. Through our words and actions we forget that the Lord is among us. We selfishly have our own interests in mind. We aren't always the loving and tender parent or child that the Lord calls us to be. We speak cutting words to those who are closest to us. When things don't go our way, we are quick to cast blame rather than to acknowledge our own contribution to the problem. We are the lawless ones about whom the apostle John writes. Sin is lawlessness. It is because of our rebellion against God that it was necessary for our Heavenly Father to send His dear Son, born of Mary, to be our Savior.

Because of our sin, it was necessary 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. In Him we have forgiveness.

It was through the Word empowered waters of Holy Baptism that the love of the Father was lavished on you that you should be called children of God. As John says, "And that is what we are." Since we are now His forgiven children, we are heirs of heaven. John continues, "And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as he is pure." (1 John 3:3)

Our Lord said to His disciples in our text, "See My hands and feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and blood as you see I have" (v. 39). To us He says this day, "See My body and blood, that it is I Myself. Taste and see that the Lord is good, for a spirit does not have body and blood as you taste that I have and that I give for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins, for the life of the world." The Psalmist writes, "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" Through this Feast our Lord feeds and strengthens us for our pilgrimage in this strange land, to prepare us to be received to our heavenly home, where we will dine at the eternal feast with Him in His glory and with all the angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven, those saints who have gone before us, including those physical eyewitnesses to our Lord's resurrection.

It was they who at first, disbelieved for joy. Then, when the Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, they went and boldly proclaimed the great good news of the risen Christ.

Your salary may not double. Your 401K probably will not quadruple over night. However, we have even greater news to celebrate! Christ has overcome all things, even death, so that we might joyfully live as His dear children even as we look forward to seeing Him face to face. He will provide for your every need! It seems too good to be true but, it is true. Christ has risen from the dead. He has forgiven all of our sins and He promises to be present with us now and forever. What joy is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.