Third Sunday of Easter 2021 18 April 2021

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Readings

Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; John 24:36-48

Our reading brings us into Luke’s gospel at the moment when the two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus returned to Jerusalem to share the news that they had seen and spoken with Jesus. We know that these two were not part of the group of Jesus’ Apostles, because Luke 24:33 says, “That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered there.”

Luke 24:36 tells us, “While they were talking about this, (Jesus making himself known to them in the breaking of bread at Emmaus), Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and terrified, and thought they were seeing a ghost.”

Now, not long before this time, these same men had watched Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. The Apostles knew Lazarus had been brought back to the fullness of his mortal being (John 11:17-44). Peter, James and John had watched as Jairus’ young daughter sat up when Jesus said, “Talitha cum (Little girl, get up)” Mark 5:35-42). And Jesus’ disciples and a large crowd had watched as the son of the widow in Nain sat up on his funeral bier and began to speak (Luke 7:11-17).

One, even two or three resurrected people, could be considered miracle moments when God’s power to restore life was displayed through Jesus. In fact, if we consider the Deuteronomic law of witness, this is exactly the number of witnesses required to establish valid testimony. These three people served as proof that Jesus was who he claimed to be – the Son of God.

But the testimony did not stop there – with miracle moments. When Jesus was raised from the dead, I believe his Apostles, especially Peter, James and John, realized they were no longer witnesses to moments, but were active participants in a miracle movement.

I want us to consider for a moment the law of witnesses in Scripture, because Jesus made its importance clear. We read of the necessity of two or three witnesses in Deuteronomy 19:15, Matthew 18:16, 2 Corinthians 13:1, and John 8:17-18. In John 8:18 Jesus said, “I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.”

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus brought together a valid number of mortal witnesses with a valid number of heavenly witnesses to establish the reality of life with God in the heavenly realm as truth. The gateway moment of Jesus’ Passion that was going to take away the barrier between these two sets of witnesses representing the realms of heaven and earth was on the horizon, but Peter, James and John could not yet understand (Matthew 17:1, Mark 9:2, Luke 9:28).

Before Jesus’ death and Resurrection his followers had been called to reorient their thinking about the Messiah from a vision of a conquering warrior who would throw off the bonds of Roman oppression to a Messiah concerned with building the Kingdom of God through love and healing and compassion.

But, after Jesus’ Resurrection, the disciples were called to make an even greater leap in their faith and understanding. Jesus had not been preparing them for isolated ‘miracle moments’ of resurrection – Jesus had been preparing them to become part of a “miracle movement” that would change heaven and earth forever.

Luke wrote that the Apostles and all those with them were terrified and doubting whether they were really seeing Jesus. After eating to display that his body was mortal, Jesus then began to open their hearts to understand all that he had been saying to them since the Mount of Transfiguration. Luke said Jesus’ opened the Apostle’s minds to understand the scriptures (Luke 24:45) just as he had done with the two men walking to Emmaus (Luke 24:27).

Let’s take a moment to think about all that Jesus’ bodily resurrection would require from his followers. Jesus’ resurrection would require them to live into a new reality – a completely changed understanding of life and death. Jesus’ resurrection required his followers to wrestle with the idea of repentance through a changed understanding of eternity and reconciliation with God. They could no longer think of repentance as an act of contrition only without life change.

In that moment Jesus was beginning to call his followers into becoming “Easter people.” Their minds had been completely focused on the empty tomb, and now Jesus was turning their attention from his death and the empty tomb toward God’s eternal Kingdom and the work they were called to do in building this new Kingdom.

Reality had completely changed over the course of just a few days. Jesus was telling them that they no longer needed to fear what they, and most every person, had feared all their lives. Death’s sting and the fear of death that had such power over them was gone – swallowed up by Jesus Christ’s victory over death and the promise of eternity with God that he shared with them.

So here is my question and challenge for us today as God’s people.

Do we celebrate being Easter people who are part of a miracle movement in our daily lives? Are we living the reality of all Jesus revealed to be true about our relationship with God, and are we sharing this witness with others as Jesus commissions us to do?

I often hear from people that our funeral services are beautiful because they celebrate the reality of Easter – of our hope of life with God.

If this is how people know us, by our lifting up the miracle of the power of life with God at the moment of a person’s death – we are missing the mark.

We are called to be an Easter people known for being part of God’s miracle movement, not from a limited human understanding of miracle moments.

I encourage you to sit with God’s Word this week and pray for understanding and inspiration, and I want each of us to ask God to give us at least one opportunity this week to share our faith with someone who needs to know that Jesus can give them new life and hope and peace. And through this, you will find that God brings encouragement and new life and hope and peace to your heart also. Amen.