

Sunday 23rd April 2023 'Be Empowered' Luke 24v36-49 Jesus Appears to the Disciples

Talk by Tom Yacomeni

³⁶ While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

³⁷ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹ 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."

⁴⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹ And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate it in their presence.

⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

They say time flies when you are having fun, but I can't believe we're already coming to the end of our Spring sermon series on Luke's Gospel. Over the weeks we have looked at what it means for us to embody the life and message of Jesus in our everyday lives – to literally 'be Good news' for those around us and our communities. We started by looking at the calling of the first disciples and Jesus' instruction to 'put out into deeper water and let down your nets for a catch'. This is the invitation to step out and take risks in obedience to Jesus which we have adopted as our verse of the year for 2023.

Then over the weeks we looked at living as forgiven people, set free by Christ, free to love our enemies, not judging others, but bringing the grace, peace and healing of Jesus to the situations and storms we face. We talked about faith and the power of prayer, then as we came towards Easter we followed Jesus' journey to the cross, meeting characters like Zacchaeus along the way. Then last week Robert looked at the story of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, who encountered the risen Christ and experienced a paradigm shift in their thinking as Jesus opened their minds to really understand the scriptures and his purpose in coming.

So now we come to the final chapter of Luke and this wonderful account of Jesus appearing to the disciples on the evening of that first Easter Sunday. Luke and John both describe this evening appearance in their gospel accounts, and Mark also references it in summary form.

John tells us that the disciples were meeting together behind locked doors for fear of the Jewish authorities. But Jesus nevertheless comes and stands among them and by doing this he gives us a glimpse of the Kingdom where there is no need for locks or security to exclude or confine people. Jesus promised wherever 2 or 3 are gathered in his name he promises to be there with them – and even here and now the Kingdom of God is not constrained by locks or walls. If you hear about what God does in places like North Korea, where churches have started in places like prison toilets, you know that the Holy Spirit always finds a way to encourage his people.

The first thing Jesus says to his followers after the resurrection is: 'Peace be with you'. For thousands of years, Jews have been greeting each other with the blessing, "peace be upon you," or in the Hebrew, "shalom aleichem," with the other person responding, "upon you be peace," or "aleichem shalom." For a Jew, saying 'Peace be with you or upon you' also expected a response.

This exchange is the initial way to mark trust in a relationship and is a sign of unity. Rabbis taught that if someone greets another with peace and that person does not return the greeting, the person may be called a robber, because they are withholding their shalom blessing.

This understanding of Shalom expecting reciprocation or 'pay back' stems from the use of its root word 'Shalam' in the law of Moses. In Exodus 21-22 Moses uses the word Shalam 14 times when he is giving instructions to the people about what to do in cases of theft or injury. A person who has been robbed or injured feels lacking or incomplete. So the one responsible is required to "make it good", "pay back", or to "restore" the loss. The ancient Hebrew meaning of shalom was "to make something whole". Not just regarding practical restoration of things that were lost or stolen, but with an overall sense of fulness and completeness in mind, body and estate.

This meaning of wholeness carries over into the word *Shalom*. In Genesis 43:27-28, when Joseph, still unrecognized by his brothers, asks about his father's health and well-being, he enquires about his *Shalom*.

"Then he asked them about their well-being, and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" [lit. How is his Shalom?] And they answered, "Your servant our father is in good health; he is still alive." (NKJV Gen 43:27-28)

So is anything robbing you of peace today? Jesus says in John 10 10 'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.'

Sometimes there is a battle raging over our sense of Shalom, but this wonderful wholeness and peace is the first thing that Jesus offers the group of frightened disciples. In many ways that is the essence of the Gospel. When he sent out the 72 disciples on mission in Luke chapter 10, Jesus said ' "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you.

The offer of shalom peace is the first sign of the Kingdom. Peace with God is the building block of personal and community wellbeing, which is why Jesus starts his teaching on the sermon on the mount with the beatitudes which include 'Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.'

God is offering the world his Shalom peace through Christ's work on the cross, but it is up to us to receive it, share it and to reflect that peace back to God. But the rest of the passage shows us how to receive God's peace and it starts with knowing the reality of God, the forgiveness of God and the purpose of God.

Peace is not the absence of conflict or challenge – it is the reality of God and the presence of Jesus that brings peace. My friend David Bute writes a daily email from his church in Cherkassy Ukraine and often talks about peace and things to be grateful for despite the war going on around them.

Our family has had an anxious weekend as Mims' father had complications after a triple by-pass surgery on Wednesday. But we prayed for God's peace in the midst of the trauma and we knew the Lord was with him in intensive care.

We live in anxious times and we have such an important job to do sharing the life and message of Jesus in our locality, because people are crying out for that profound sense of shalom peace.

As Tom shared earlier the Rock project is not an easy journey but as we step out in faith, putting one foot in front of the other God will provide. What he orders, he pays for! Back in November it looked like an impossibility that the Miles family could find housing in Weston. But here we are only 5 months later and they have moved in. Thank you Lord and thank you to those whose generosity made it happen! On a larger scale we still need a half a million pounds to start building the extension for the Rock project and then a further million to complete everything we have planning permission for. So in a sense we are on our knees asking God for guidance, wisdom and a sense of shalom peace about the project. We have definitely put out into deep water! But integrity dictates we cannot instruct builders unless we have enough money in the bank to pay them. We can start with just the internal reordering, heating electrics and lighting, but it would be so much more cost effective not to have to delay the work on the extension. So this is a time of getting on our knees again and asking the Lord to pour in his shalom peace.

Jesus takes the disciples through a process to restore their sense of shalom peace: Starting with reassuring them of the reality of his presence.

The disciples were too frightened to respond properly – Luke says they were startled and frightened, thinking they had seen a ghost. But Jesus reassures them and says 'It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.'

It is fascinating to note that Luke goes to great lengths to emphasise Jesus didn't come to the disciples as some spiritual apparition. He is definitely countering a potential conspiracy theory that the disciples just saw an apparition or a hallucination. So Jesus requests something to eat.

In the same way that he requested some food for the little girl raised from the dead in Luke 8, eating food together is a sign of normality. Jesus ate some cooked fish in front of the disciples. All is well. He is alive and he has an appetite too.

So peace comes first through believing in the reality of Jesus. Then it comes through understanding what he has done for us on the cross. And Jesus did that through a bible study: Verse 45:

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

The fact is that we can read the scriptures, and yet not understand them at all. The disciples would have been familiar with the Torah, the Psalms and the Prophets, but v45 says he opened their minds to understand them.

If we are to understand scripture we need our minds opening by the Holy Spirit. That's why it is good to pray for God to show us what his Word means when we open the Bible. When we finally get it, we finally understand how God's plans for humanity unfolded over thousands of years and find their fulfilment in those pivotal moments at the cross and resurrection.

God did not impose his will on us. Instead he gave us free will, in order that we can learn to first receive and then give true, genuine unconditional love. God in Christ offered reconciliation with himself through the cross, that we may freely take up that offer through repentance and forgiveness for our sins that separate us from his love.

Everyone is searching for shalom peace. But our job is to be witnesses to the fact that peace comes through knowing the reality of Jesus, that his presence is with us here right now and that he offers us the opportunity to change our ways and get right with God. Because if God is for us, then who can be against us?

So as well as the reality of Jesus and receiving forgiveness, the final key to peace is knowing our purpose.

Jesus told the disciples: 'You are witnesses of these things'. Luke's version of the great commission.

Despite all their fears and failures, Jesus entrusts the disciples with a vital task: to Share the life and message of Jesus with everyone. The word for witness is *Martyrs* – it later became used for those who gave their lives defending the good news, but unless we have found something worth dying for, perhaps we aren't really living.

Our purpose in life is to see God's glorious work and then share that with others. Matthew 5v16 "Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven."

So when Jesus says 'Peace be with you', he is offering us that perfect love that casts out fear, the reality of his presence, forgiveness for our failures and a future purpose too. Let's not rob God by withholding that peace from others, but let's pray for his power to enable us to do that – the power that was poured out on the Church at Pentecost and is available for us today.