

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 04/14/2024



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Third Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary Year B

Sunday, April 14th

Luke 24:36b-48

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Escalating proof

The Gospel lection for this Third Sunday of Easter details the third resurrection appearance of Jesus in Luke's Gospel on the first Easter Sunday. While Luke does not specify the precise location beyond Jerusalem, it appears to be the same event described by John where Jesus appeared to the disciples in a room behind locked doors (John 20:19-23). The appearance of Jesus to His disciples and the actions of Jesus demonstrates escalating proof that He is stood before them in the flesh. The text illustrates how physical proof (seeing, touching, and eating) was one thing, but Scriptural proof was the most definitive. This text ultimately leads to two unmistakable conclusions for disciples of Jesus: death is not the end and we have a specific, divinely appointed job to do on this earth as Christ's witnesses.

Luke 24:36b-48 Commentary

The events leading up to the text are as follows: In Luke's Gospel, the women find the tomb empty and encounter the two men in "dazzling apparel" who remind them of Jesus' predictions how "the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise" (v.7). The women tell the apostles what happened, but they did not believe them. Peter ran to the tomb and saw the empty tomb and the grave cloths by themselves, marveling at what had happened (vv.1-12). The Gospel then provides a detailed account of the appearance of Jesus to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. As the two disciples rush back to Jerusalem after this encounter, they found the eleven disciples and those who were with them gathered discussing how the Lord had appeared to Peter - although this specific event is not detailed in Luke. The two disciples from Emmaus tell of what they had seen (vv.13-35).

³⁶ As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸ And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

The disciples were gathered discussing the two resurrection appearances. One can imagine how some must have believed while others did not. Jesus suddenly stood among them and greeted them with the normal greeting of the day. The text indicates how the disciples were startled and frightened, thinking Jesus was a spirit. Jesus questions them about their fear and doubt. Earlier, the two men in dazzling attire had reminded the women who found the empty tomb of what Jesus had told them earlier while in Galilee that he would rise from the dead (v.7). The women remembered what Jesus had said and would have told such to the other disciples.

³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

Jesus knows that His disciples think He is a spirit and seeks to convince them by inviting them to touch Him – noting that spirits do not have flesh and bones.

⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

Apparently, the disciples were still not convinced. Jesus then requests some food and eats in front of them to convince them He is alive and in the flesh.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

Jesus then reminds them of what He had taught them (9:22; 18:31-33) which at the time they did not fully understand. Now He “*opens their minds*” to understand what the Scriptures say about Him. This text contains the final “*dei*” statement (it is necessary/must) from Jesus in Luke’s Gospel – the Scriptures *must* be fulfilled (a divine necessity). Luke’s version of the great commission is then revealed that is further explained in Acts.

Reflection and Action

Many doubters and skeptics claim to be holding out for some firm evidence that Christ is who He said He is. What form would such evidence have to take? In our world, facts and physical evidence appear to be irrelevant. In our politically polarized culture, video evidence emerging of a politician caught in a lie is immediately dismissed by supporters while the detractors already believed in the first place without any evidence. One can only assume an actual video of Jesus rising from the dead would meet with the same response and that evidence of Jesus walking on water would be pounced upon by detractors as evidence that Jesus could not swim and how could the true Messiah of God not be able to swim? Our biases (often unconscious biases) are more influential than proof!

In this week’s text, Jesus begins by offering physical evidence. First, He invites His disciples to use their eyes. *Look – it’s me! See my hands and feet!* Then He invites them to touch Him. Then He eats in front of them to dispel any lingering doubt that He is a spirit and thus not physically present in the flesh. Then He reminds them of what He had told them – *I told you this would happen!* What more convincing proof could Jesus give after this? To Jesus, Scriptural proof was the pinnacle as He opened the minds of His disciples to understand what the Scriptures said about Christ – the same way that the Holy Spirit opens the mind of believers today. “*Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?*” (v.32).

No wonder the Scriptures – the Holy Bible – are under relentless attack from the enemy in our time. Of course, this started back in Genesis 3 with the serpent causing Eve to question what God had said: “*Did God really say...*”

The disciples gathered on that first Easter Sunday had their assumptions about life totally transformed. New life is possible. Death is not the final word. Our lives mean something. We have a divine task to accomplish. On the other hand, skepticism will let us off the hook – at least for a little while.

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