

LUKE 23:50 - 24:53

Luke's story does not end, of course, with the death of Jesus. For Luke, the disciples' encounter with the risen Lord is the critical event that sends them out into the world. The book that began with assurances that the writer's material is based on eyewitness accounts (1:2) now concludes by emphasizing the experiences of those who witness the resurrection. Indeed, as Luke's gospel draws to a close, Jesus sends the disciples to be witnesses themselves to all nations.

23: 50-56 - The Burial of Jesus

Like Nicodemus, Joseph is one of those religious authorities who, as a body, condemned Jesus and engineered his crucifixion. But Joseph is also someone who is a closet disciple of Jesus. We know from the Acts of the Apostles that there were Pharisees and priests who became Christians. But like Nicodemus, Joseph must be careful not to be found out, otherwise he has a lot to lose. He offers his love and his discipleship in a quiet way.

24: 1-12 – The Resurrection of Jesus

The first accounts of the resurrection speak of an empty tomb. What could be made of an empty tomb? For those who don't believe in Jesus resurrected, the empty tomb speaks of Jesus' body taken somewhere else or stolen. The women who come to the tomb, though, encounter two men (angels?) who remind them of what Jesus himself predicted would happen. The women are identified by name and this is important. They would be part of the early church and would be the source of this story. If only one of them saw the two men and told the story, it could be questioned. But the fact that all of them tell a similar story makes it far more compelling.

The disciples, understandably, don't believe the women's story. How could they? It's totally unbelievable, regardless of what Jesus would have said. They still haven't seen Jesus. However, Peter runs to the tomb and does, indeed, see that it is empty. Jesus' body has not only been moved, but all the wrapping around his body has been removed as well. What could this mean?

24: 13-35 – The Walk to Emmaus

This is an encounter between Jesus and two disciples on the road unique to Luke's gospel. The disciples don't recognize Jesus. How could they? Even though he looked familiar, the last time they saw Jesus he was mutilated and then dead. Clearly, he looked quite different now. Also, they could not imagine Jesus to be alive, so whatever this stranger looked like, their minds could never imagine it could be Jesus. The recognition comes from other things. First, the stranger helps them understand that even though this is not how they expected redemption would come to Israel, the suffering of the messiah became part of the plan and it was a plan already foreseen by various prophetic scriptural references. The stranger helps them re-learn the story of

Israel with a crucified and resurrected messiah becoming the culminating point.

Secondly, they recognize Jesus as they are sharing a meal which becomes Holy Communion. For all those who would come after, the sharing of Holy Communion would become an experience of Christ being present, just like for those first disciples.

Immediately, they leave and return to Jerusalem to tell the others. When they come to Jerusalem to tell the others, they discover that Jesus has also appeared to Peter. They now begin to believe the women's story that Jesus is, indeed, risen.

24: 36-49 – Jesus appears to His Disciples

While they are going back and forth in wonder and excitement recounting what they have experienced, Jesus comes among them. He speaks words we also hear in John's gospel account, namely: "peace be with you." They needed to be assured, relieved of their fear and their doubt. He invites them to touch him, especially where nails and spear would have made wounds. He also eats in front of them so that they see he is no ghost. Clearly, many would question whether Jesus was really resurrected in physical form. This account is intended to answer such questions definitively. Jesus is different, yes. But he is also the same. He is spiritual, yes. But he is also flesh and blood.

Jesus also commissions them to proclaim his message and his redemption. They will receive spiritual power to do this with confidence and faith. He will go away physically so that he can come back to be with them spiritually as Holy Spirit. Only as Holy Spirit can he be with them always and inside them wherever they will be.

24: 50-53 – The Ascension of Jesus

In this account, Jesus leaves them within a day it seems. In the first chapter of Acts, we're told he is with them 40 days before he ascends, teaching them and encouraging them. Pentecost will come on the 50th day after Easter morn when the Holy Spirit comes upon them and empowers them to be the church – the hands, feet and heart of Jesus together and in the world, and communities reflecting his kingdom fellowship until he comes again.