

Following His Resurrection from the grave, Jesus appeared to His disciples and many others during the forty days between the Resurrection and His ascension back into heaven. Last Sunday we discussed His appearance to the two believers on the Road to Emmaus. This morning, let's look at the next appearance as recorded in the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Luke, verses 36 through 49. This appearance occurs on Easter night in the Upper Room after Jesus had appeared earlier at Emmaus. The two believers had rushed back to Jerusalem and were telling the disciples about their experience when Jesus appears. The Upper Room was where Jesus had shared the Lord's Supper with His disciples on the night that He was arrested, and where the disciples were gathered trying to make sense of all that had happened earlier in the day.

Read Luke 24:36-49

Listen to verse 36 again: "While they were talking about this, Jesus Himself stood among them." They were talking about Jesus and all that had happened over the past few days; or maybe they were gossiping! And guess what, the person that they were talking about suddenly appeared right there in front of them. Look at the reaction of the disciples; they were startled and terrified; you bet they were! Wouldn't you like to be able to do that? Just suddenly appear whenever anyone started gossiping or talking about you? Boy, I bet that would cut down on the whispering and put some gossips out of business.

In a small town, the pastors of the three local churches decided to form a support group that met once a week. After several months, they had finally built enough trust amongst themselves that they were able to start sharing their personal concerns and problems. One day during lunch, one of the pastors told his colleagues that he had a gambling problem and was tempted to take money out of the collection plate. Another one of the pastors admitted that he had a drinking problem and really enjoyed the wine left over from communion. Both pastors noticed that the third pastor seemed quiet, and to be in a hurry to leave, so they asked him what the problem was. He reluctantly told them that he was a compulsive gossip, and he couldn't wait to share what they had just told him with the rest of the town.

Someone once said that if he had been Jesus, he would have done the post-resurrection appearances a little differently. First, he would have gone to the house of the High Priest and scared the living heck out of him. Then after spooking him for a while, he would have gone to the palace of Pontius Pilate and made him wash his hands again. Then he would have gone to the barracks of the Romans soldiers who mocked, beat and crucified him, and showed them what a real King looked like up close and personal. He said that he would have had a lot of fun

on Easter morning. However, Jesus had another purpose, a more serious one; that of making true believers of His followers and preparing them to carry on His ministry.

As you study the gospel accounts of Jesus' appearances following the Resurrection, you see that things are happening fast. The disciples during this time are an interesting study in human behavior. You remember that when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, they all ran for the hills leaving Jesus alone to face the soldiers and the trial. We are told that Peter and John followed at a distance and entered the courtyard of the High Priest where Jesus was being interrogated. This is where Peter fulfilled Jesus' prophecy and denied that he was one of Jesus' disciples not once, but three times. During the crucifixion, the only disciple that is recorded near the cross is John, and ironically, this is only recorded in the gospel that John wrote himself, after all the other disciples had died. However, the Gospel of Luke tells us that those who knew Jesus stood at a distance.

It appears that these words "at a distance" best describe the disciples during this time. This might explain why the doors of the Upper Room were locked as recorded in the Gospel of John. They were scared for their lives and wondered what was going to happen next. So they wanted to keep everybody at a distance. They were listening in terror for every foot step on the stairs, and for every knock at the door, lest they too would be arrested by the religious authorities. They were afraid that the authorities might also crucify them or at least blame them for the disappearance of Jesus' body. Even though several of them had already seen Jesus alive that day, they still had some doubts and didn't want to take any chances. This resurrection stuff was still Greek to them. They were confused about what to do next and certainly about what the future held for them. So they tried to keep everybody at a distance.

Then Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst and gave them the normal Eastern greeting of "Peace be with you," which means: "May God give you every good thing." Now remember that the door was locked and that Jesus just walked right through the door and stood before them. I bet their eyes looked like a deer in headlights and you could have heard a pin drop. Have you ever wondered what would have happened if Jesus had shouted "Boo?" I bet they would have gone through that shut door without opening it, with Peter leading the way.

Because of their behavior the previous Friday, they may have been expecting a tongue lashing or criticism, but Jesus calms their fears. As you read the Scriptures, you see a drastic change in the behavior of the disciples at this point. Jesus' greeting goes beyond the casual wishing of peace on someone. This was an entirely different kind of peace. His words were more than a mere phrase. Throughout His ministry, Jesus spoke of the peace that believers could experience in their personal lives and with God. This was the peace that He promised in John 14:27 when He said: "Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." By being at peace with Jesus Christ,

the believers were connected to the One who would give them peace in all circumstances. "Peace be with you" was Jesus' invitation for them to be at peace with His crucifixion so that they could now experience His Resurrected presence.

What a difference the Lord makes when He enters a person's life. Before Jesus appeared to them, the disciples were running, hiding or standing at a distance, but weeks later as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, Peter and the other disciples boldly stand before the High Priest and religious authorities, and tell them that they will not stop witnessing for Jesus, even if it means their imprisonment and death. Once they had seen the Risen Lord, they were empowered by the Holy Spirit and nothing on earth could stop them from proclaiming the Good News. These same people who were frightened and hiding behind locked doors that Easter evening would become the foundation of the early church. And the same is true for you and me when we let the Holy Spirit into our lives.

Now this is a great story, but how does it apply to lives today? What can we learn from this story? Let's explore this from several different angles. First, unlike the disciples, as we discussed last Sunday, do we expect to see Jesus each day? In Matthew 28:20, Jesus promised to be with His followers always, even to the end of time. Do we really believe that? If we do, how often do we look for Him? How often do we recognize His hands at work in the world around us? Or is our image of Jesus always sitting at the right hand of God in heaven? Now that's the image many people like because it keeps Him safely at a distance and out of our way. Most of us probably don't even stop once a day and think: "There's the Lord." Maybe once a week here in church during communion or a favorite hymn, we might sense His presence. But is that enough? Jesus said that He is always with us, but most of us only think of Him on Sunday. What about during the rest of the week?

You know there are millions of people all over the world who have problems with their eyesight. Over 50 percent of Americans over the age of thirty wear either eyeglasses like me or contact lenses. Many eyesight problems exist: near-sightedness, far-sightedness, blurred vision, tunnel vision, and numerous other difficulties. And I think that I can safely say that well over 50 percent of Americans have problems with their spiritual eyesight. Because of our spiritual blindness, we don't see or look for Jesus anymore.

Now there are many things that cause our spiritual blindness, that prevent us from seeing the Lord at work in our daily lives. The biggest one is sin which separates us from God and really keeps Jesus at a distance; so far away that we can't see Him. Then there is our tendency to put other things such as work and recreation before God; thus, getting our priorities all wrong. We get so busy with other things that we don't spend enough time with the Lord to get to know Him and develop a personal relationship with Him. Thus, instead of being a friend that we recognize immediately, He's a stranger!

There is a story about an individual who had accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. One night he had a strange dream in which he was trapped in a very deep well. He looked up and saw a single star in the nighttime sky far above him which appeared to let down lines of silver light that took hold of him and lifted him up. Then he looked down and he began to sink farther into the well. But when he looked up again, he started to rise. Each time he looked down he sank and each time he looked up he rose. Thus, he found that by simply keeping his eye on the star he rose out of the well until his feet were on solid ground. The message of this dream was to keep your eyes on your Savior, not yourself. When we focus on the Lord and the good in life, we will see Him and be lifted up. The devil will try to build barriers around us, but he can never put a roof over us so that we cannot see Jesus, if we make an effort to look for Him.

To see Jesus, we must also look through His eyes. Unfortunately, most of us tend to see the world around us through the wrong set of glasses, the glasses of the world that we have become comfortable with, instead of using the glasses that Jesus offers us. There was a commercial on TV about a new type of sunglasses. They said that the glasses may not make the world better, but they will make the world look better. That's what Jesus does for us.

During His ministry, Jesus gave us some hints on how to recognize Him. First, we see Him in those who help others. In the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25, Jesus says that those who feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothes to those who are naked, and visit those who are sick or in prison will enter the kingdom of heaven. But those who do not will be denied entrance and destined for hell. The Bible tells us that each group asked the Lord when did they see Him hungry, thirsty, naked, sick and in prison, and He said: "Whenever you did this for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me." The point is that not only should we see Jesus in those who are serving others, but also in those who need to be served.

But Jesus is not just at work, school or the store. As the disciples also found out that Easter night, you don't have to go looking for Him, Jesus comes looking for us. This reminds me of a story about a man who came home at the end of the workday, and his wife said to him: "The new minister came by today and he asked a question that I could not answer." "What did he ask?" "He asked me if Jesus Christ lived here?" "And what did you say?" her husband demanded. "I didn't know what to say," she replied. "Well, couldn't you tell him that we are respectable people?" "But he didn't ask that." "Well, why didn't you tell him that we go to church when we feel like it?" "But he didn't ask that either." "Then you could have told him that we read the Bible - sometimes." "But he didn't ask me that. What he asked me was 'Does Jesus Christ live here?'"

That's a good question for all of us this morning! Does Jesus live in our homes; is He part of our lives? Now that's a serious question, my friends; because if we only see Jesus at church, we

are like the disciples in our story this morning, keeping Him at a safe distance. Are we trying to keep Jesus at a safe distance because we are afraid that He might want us to change our current lifestyle? Are you comfortable with where your life is right now or do you want to grow closer to the Lord? We will never grow in our personal relationship with Him and become the person that He wants us to become if we don't let Him get closer to us. Open your hearts, and let Jesus get closer than a brother or sister. Then see the difference He will make in your life like He did for the disciples that night.

In closing, we must train ourselves to look for Jesus in our daily lives, in the people we encounter each day. We need to be aware of those who need Him and His Church. I challenge you – I challenge myself – this week, as we drive here and there, as we go shopping, as we enjoy time off, as we go out to eat, to watch for the Lord at work in our lives and the lives of those around us. Pay attention or you just might miss Him. He's everywhere! He's everywhere! Amen