

The 3rd Sunday of Easter
April 18, 2021

"Empty handed? Behold and see"
(Luke 24:39)
By Rev. Ed Weber
LSB 465

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today’s text for this Easter morning is from our Gospel reading Luke 24:39

“Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

Here ends our text.

“Sing choirs of angels loud and clear! **Repeat their song of glory here.** Christ has triumphed! Christ has triumphed! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!” What beautiful hymnody we just sang in our hymn of the day “Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds”.

The angels were taking turns going to the empty tomb to tell any visitor the Good News that Jesus has triumphed! And that message was repeated by Jesus Himself, the author of the Good News to the women, to Peter, to the Emmaus disciples.

Even as the Emmaus disciples who had quickly returned to the locked room in Jerusalem were recounting what they had heard and seen, Jesus Himself appears to all. He just appeared and stood there all of sudden. He didn’t even walk through a wall or a door.

“Peace be to you”. Jesus says. This is more than just a greeting. He who is peace Himself, having stilled the wrath of the Father by His blood sacrificed on the cross, now conveys to the disciples what His resurrection proves. There is peace with God and His resurrection seals this to the disciples and to us!

Yes, the angels' song of Christ's triumph is repeated to us this day! Christ has triumphed over your sins!

It was so much to take in all at once for the disciples. Their senses weren't able to process what they were seeing with their eyes and hearing with their ears. They were overloaded, marveling, alarmed and disbelieving. Ok, use your sense of touch now.

“Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

Behold what love the Father has given for you to now touch. Handle Me, it's Me, flesh and bones. The flesh and bones that endured the punishment of the world and is alive to prove that you have been justified. See the nail holes in My hands and feet? I'm not a ghost. It's really Me.

Behold how patient Jesus is with us. Use your sense of smell and taste now. Do you have some food? You know what fish smells and tastes like. Watch Me now as I eat.

And lastly, having removed their doubts through their senses, Jesus opens up their minds. He brings the truth of the resurrection to their hearts.

“Eternal is the gift He brings. Therefore our heart with rapture sings: “Christ has triumphed. He is living! Now still He comes to give us life and by His presence stills our strife. Christ has triumphed! Alleluia!”

So we sang in verse 2 of the hymn of the day. Jesus appeared in that room and is present with us today to give the fruits of His resurrection. Though our senses are not called to physically see, hear, touch the Risen Lord, our hearts do this through faith in His word.

And what is that word?

“that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,...” (Luke 24:45-46)

If it's written in Scripture, then it has to be fulfilled. That simple! It had to be fulfilled in Jesus. If Jonah was in the belly of a whale for three days and Jesus said so must the Son of Man...then that's what had to happen.

Christ had to suffer for Jonah's sins and all of ours. He had to die. But, Scripture also says that He would rise from the dead. For as we hear in Acts 2:31 David **“spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.”**

God's Word must be fulfilled. Scripture cannot be broken. Not a jot or tittle can be changed or removed.

But, Jesus doesn't stop there does He? What does Jesus tell the disciples and each of us next? Remember if Scripture says it, it must be fulfilled. Jesus says an important word, the word **“and”**.

For something else must be fulfilled!

“and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” (Luke 24:47-48)

The angels' message must be repeated to all nations starting at Jerusalem where the Holy Spirit would begin the New Testament church on Pentecost. 50 days from His resurrection! Thanks be to God that the angel's message has been repeated to us this day!

Who are witnesses of these things? You are! Your minds have been opened by the same Holy Spirit who was promised and came at Pentecost! You and I have a message to preach of repentance and remission of sins in Jesus' name! It's been given to you. Christ has triumphed.

Ahh, it had to be given to us. Our minds had to be opened as well. God had to do this because on our own we are no different than those fearful disciples behind locked doors.

Jesus entered and showed His hands that triumphed for us. He came not empty-handed. They looked empty-handed but they were filled with peace and life and victory! He came. He gives.

Has anyone ever said to you that phrase, “you came home empty-handed?” Maybe you were supposed to pick something up at the store but they were out of it so you came home empty-handed. It’s a frustrating loss of time, isn’t it?

Have you ever gone to a party and someone came empty-handed? Maybe you?

Have you ever been in the situation when a job needs to get done and someone says, “everyone grab a broom, dustpan or rag to get this room cleaned up” and someone stands around empty-handed? Was that someone ever you?

Well, the disciples stood around behind locked doors, empty-handed. They had nothing in their hands that could change their situation. They had only despair, sadness and a cloud of fear and death.

We are no different. Our sins have left us empty-handed and spiritually destitute. We have nothing to offer to God to make amends.

In our first reading from Acts 3, Peter calls out the Jews who had crucified Jesus.

“you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.” (Acts 3:14-15)

They were caught empty-handed and red-handed! They had blood on their hands – Jesus’ blood. Are we guilty as well of denying Jesus? Whenever we deny His Scripture and live as we want to live, we deny Jesus. We have blood on our hands too.

And yet, there is that angels’ message. It’s a message of triumph for all sinners, Jews and Gentiles alike – for all nations. So, Peter continues.

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before,” (Acts 3:19-20)

Times of refreshing. Times of refreshing that only can come from the presence of the Lord. We can’t manufacture this refreshing. Jesus the Prince of Life, the Prince of Peace must come into our presence as He came into the presence of the disciples on Easter Day to open their minds and convince them of the Good News of His resurrection.

Yes, Jesus is sent to you this day through His word. He doesn't come empty-handed but brings all His gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation! He brings them through His same Scripture that was spoken by the prophets. He stands in your midst and absolves you through His called and ordained servants, His under-shepherds. And He brings them through the Lord's Supper in which He gives you His very body and blood to eat and drink for your forgiveness...for your refreshing!

Ahh, we come empty-handed but we never leave empty-handed to our homes! For Jesus gives to us His bountiful gifts through the Holy Spirit. And we go to our heavenly home not empty-handed, but with Jesus' full pardon and His righteousness!

And the same Holy Spirit leads us also to repeat the Good News that we have heard to a soul who is empty-handed and lost in sin. You are witnesses of these things! You are witnesses of the greatest of things... For you are as our epistle reading called you – children of God through faith!

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1)

And we are! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)