

Sermon Luke 24 36 49 3rd S of Easter S B

Sermon: 3rd Sunday of Easter

Text: Luke 24:36-49 (v. 36)

Theme: Christ is among us.

Goal: To assure that the living Christ is with us giving us the true understanding of the Scriptures and the true faith to be His witnesses.

Dear Friends,

Dear new members of St. Thomas,

Introduction: Do you believe that the living Christ is among us today? What would be your reaction if He appeared bodily now??? - When Jesus appeared to the disciples for the very first time after His resurrection, they couldn't believe it! On the contrary, “they were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost”. Our reaction wouldn't be different. Maybe we would run away, or collapse... But in fact He is with us now!

I – Jesus in our service

We are not just in a classroom, or in an assembly of friends. We are in a church, in God's house! a) When we begin our service *“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”*, we are calling our God to be with us, and whatever will happen in the Service is done *“in the name of”* our God and on His behalf. b) The Absolution of Sins is done *“In the name of”* our Triune God. c) Before the Readings, we say: *“The Lord be with you”*. And you answer: *“And with your spirit”*. We are opening the Bible to listen to God speaking to us in His Word. We sing Alleluia and Glory before the Gospel reading, the very voice of Jesus. d) At the beginning of the Lord's Supper Liturgy we say again, *“The Lord be with you”*, because we believe that He is among us in His body and blood in the Sacrament. And we share the same peace Jesus gave to His disciples: *“The peace of the Lord be with you*

always". e) And before the Blessing, we say again: "*The Lord be with you*", assuring that He comes with us in the new week with His blessing.

II – Jesus opens our minds

Jesus comes to us and stays among us because He knows our weaknesses and fears. We are Christians, we confess our faith in Jesus, but we are always trembling and frightened because we see what is happening around us in the world. He has to say to us what He said to the disciples: "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken...And then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures... And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself".

When we read in advance the Bible texts for the Service or for the Bible Study, sometimes we cannot understand it very clearly. Our mind is too narrow, like that of the disciples. But when we begin to study, to compare the several texts with each other, to read what other people wrote about these texts, and we pray, Jesus opens our minds to understand His message better. This is one of the goals of the church, and therefore the church trains and prepares ministers: To help people to understand the Bible better. And when we understand what God is telling us, we believe and trust in Him and in His promises.

Maybe we will not understand every detail in the Bible. Even the prophet Daniel, a very wise man of the Old Testament, didn't understand some of the prophecies God was giving him. We read in Daniel 12:8-9: "I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked: 'My Lord, what will the outcome of all this be?' He replied: 'Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end.'"

But what is necessary for our salvation, is very clearly explained in the Bible. Jesus Himself explains in our text: "Everything must be fulfilled

that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms... and this is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem". This is the heart of the church's teaching and preaching. This is the summary of God's will: That people repent of their sins and receive forgiveness by believing in Jesus' death and resurrection on our behalf.

III – Jesus gives peace and sends us as His witnesses

Jesus brings peace to all who believe in Him; peace with God, because we are forgiven and reconciled; peace with our fellows, because we are God's children (as we heard in the 2nd reading today) and we are brothers and sisters in Christ, a big Christian family. "Peace be with you" is what Jesus still says to us in His Gospel and in the Sacrament. He wants to quiet and calm our fearful and frightened hearts. Paul says: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1-2).

And this grace and this faith are not to be held for ourselves only, but they are to be shared with as many people as possible. "You are witnesses of these things", says Jesus. The disciples were eyewitnesses. Peter preached to the Jews in Acts 4:15: "You killed the Author of Life, but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this!" And the disciples went to all nations preaching repentance and forgiveness of sin in the name of Jesus. We are not eyewitnesses, but we believe in the witness of the disciples written in the Bible. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29) said Jesus to Thomas. And Jesus still opens our minds to understand the Scriptures about His work and His victory as He had opened the minds of the disciples to understand the prophecies of the Old Testament.

Jesus promised and sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples. He empowered

them to be witnesses and blessed their mission work. We have the same Holy Spirit that was given to the Apostles. The Holy Spirit was given to us when we were baptized. He comes to us every time we open the Bible to read God's Word and empowers us to be witnesses of Jesus too.

Conclusion: As we were called and gathered into the Christian church, God has many others that He wants to call through our witness. We are going to receive eight people as new members at St. Thomas today. Most of you have been Christians for a long time and are participating with us. Now you are joining us officially as members. Each of you has a circle of relatives and friends that I cannot reach. You are witnesses of God's grace and love to them. By your deeds and life, by your words and prayers, you will show them that you are beloved children of God, living in His peace and hope by faith in the resurrected Jesus, and that God loves each of them. God is still powerful and gracious to use your testimony to call others to the Christian faith and to the fellowship of this congregation. Don't worry that you don't have so much knowledge about the Bible to witness; don't worry that you are not perfect and are still sinners. Do what you can to testify God's grace in your life. God will bless the seed you sow with the power of the Holy Spirit. Don't be a stumbling stone on the way of your beloved ones, but be a light and a help to them. “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how He has had mercy on you” is our Watchword for this year. “Peace be with you!” Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle
Cape Town, 22 April 2012