

LUKE 24:13-48 ¹³ NOW THAT SAME DAY TWO OF THEM WERE GOING TO A VILLAGE CALLED EMMAUS, ABOUT SEVEN MILES FROM JERUSALEM. ¹⁴ THEY WERE TALKING WITH EACH OTHER ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT HAD HAPPENED. ¹⁵ AS THEY TALKED AND DISCUSSED THESE THINGS WITH EACH OTHER, JESUS HIMSELF CAME UP AND WALKED ALONG WITH THEM ¹⁶ BUT THEY WERE KEPT FROM RECOGNIZING HIM. ¹⁷ HE ASKED THEM, “WHAT ARE YOU DISCUSSING TOGETHER AS YOU WALK ALONG?” THEY STOOD STILL, THEIR FACES DOWNCAST. ¹⁸ ONE OF THEM, NAMED CLEOPAS, ASKED HIM, “ARE YOU THE ONLY ONE VISITING JERUSALEM WHO DOES NOT KNOW THE THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED THERE IN THESE DAYS?” ¹⁹ “WHAT THINGS?” HE ASKED. “ABOUT JESUS OF NAZARETH,” THEY REPLIED. “HE WAS A PROPHET, POWERFUL IN WORD AND DEED BEFORE GOD AND ALL THE PEOPLE. ²⁰ THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND OUR RULERS HANDED HIM OVER TO BE SENTENCED TO DEATH, AND THEY CRUCIFIED HIM; ²¹ BUT WE HAD HOPED THAT HE WAS THE ONE WHO WAS GOING TO REDEEM ISRAEL. AND WHAT IS MORE, IT IS THE THIRD DAY SINCE ALL THIS TOOK PLACE. ²² IN ADDITION, SOME OF OUR WOMEN AMAZED US. THEY WENT TO THE TOMB EARLY THIS MORNING ²³ BUT DIDN’T FIND HIS BODY. THEY CAME AND TOLD US THAT THEY HAD SEEN A VISION OF ANGELS, WHO SAID HE WAS ALIVE. ²⁴ THEN SOME OF OUR COMPANIONS WENT TO THE TOMB AND FOUND IT JUST AS THE WOMEN HAD SAID, BUT THEY DID NOT SEE JESUS.” ²⁵ HE SAID TO THEM, “HOW FOOLISH YOU ARE, AND HOW SLOW TO BELIEVE ALL THAT THE PROPHETS HAVE SPOKEN! ²⁶ DID NOT THE MESSIAH HAVE TO SUFFER THESE THINGS AND THEN ENTER HIS GLORY?” ²⁷ AND BEGINNING WITH MOSES AND ALL THE PROPHETS, HE EXPLAINED TO THEM WHAT WAS SAID IN ALL THE SCRIPTURES CONCERNING HIMSELF. ²⁸ AS THEY APPROACHED THE VILLAGE TO WHICH THEY WERE GOING, JESUS CONTINUED ON AS IF HE WERE GOING FARTHER. ²⁹ BUT THEY URGED HIM STRONGLY, “STAY WITH US, FOR IT IS NEARLY EVENING; THE DAY IS ALMOST OVER.” SO HE WENT IN TO STAY WITH THEM. ³⁰ WHEN HE WAS AT THE TABLE WITH THEM, HE TOOK BREAD, GAVE THANKS, BROKE IT AND BEGAN TO GIVE IT TO THEM. ³¹ THEN THEIR EYES WERE OPENED AND THEY RECOGNIZED HIM AND HE DISAPPEARED FROM THEIR SIGHT. ³² THEY ASKED EACH OTHER, “WERE NOT OUR HEARTS BURNING WITHIN US WHILE HE TALKED WITH US ON THE ROAD AND OPENED THE SCRIPTURES TO US?” ³³ THEY GOT UP AND RETURNED AT ONCE TO JERUSALEM. THERE THEY FOUND THE ELEVEN AND THOSE WITH THEM, ASSEMBLED TOGETHER ³⁴ AND SAYING, “IT IS TRUE! THE LORD HAS RISEN AND HAS APPEARED

TO SIMON.” ³⁵ THEN THE TWO TOLD WHAT HAD HAPPENED ON THE WAY, AND HOW JESUS WAS RECOGNIZED BY THEM WHEN HE BROKE THE BREAD. ³⁶ WHILE THEY WERE STILL TALKING ABOUT THIS, JESUS HIMSELF STOOD AMONG THEM AND SAID TO THEM, “PEACE BE WITH YOU.” ³⁷ THEY WERE STARTLED AND FRIGHTENED, THINKING THEY SAW A GHOST. ³⁸ HE SAID TO THEM, “WHY ARE YOU TROUBLED, AND WHY DO DOUBTS RISE IN YOUR MINDS? ³⁹ LOOK AT MY HANDS AND MY FEET. IT IS I MYSELF! TOUCH ME AND SEE; A GHOST DOES NOT HAVE FLESH AND BONES, AS YOU SEE I HAVE.” ⁴⁰ WHEN HE HAD SAID THIS, HE SHOWED THEM HIS HANDS AND FEET. ⁴¹ AND WHILE THEY STILL DID NOT BELIEVE IT BECAUSE OF JOY AND AMAZEMENT, HE ASKED THEM, “DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING HERE TO EAT?” ⁴² THEY GAVE HIM A PIECE OF BROILED FISH, ⁴³ AND HE TOOK IT AND ATE IT IN THEIR PRESENCE. ⁴⁴ HE SAID TO THEM, “THIS IS WHAT I TOLD YOU WHILE I WAS STILL WITH YOU: EVERYTHING MUST BE FULFILLED THAT IS WRITTEN ABOUT ME IN THE LAW OF MOSES, THE PROPHETS, AND THE PSALMS.” ⁴⁵ THEN HE OPENED THEIR MINDS SO THEY COULD UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURES. ⁴⁶ HE TOLD THEM, “THIS IS WHAT IS WRITTEN: THE MESSIAH WILL SUFFER AND RISE FROM THE DEAD ON THE THIRD DAY, ⁴⁷ AND REPENTANCE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS WILL BE PREACHED IN HIS NAME TO ALL NATIONS, BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM. ⁴⁸ YOU ARE WITNESSES OF THESE THINGS.

CHRISTIAN BELIEF, WHETHER FOUND IN A CHILD OR AN ADULT, IS A WONDROUS THING. FOR EXAMPLE: AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASS, WHICH WAS LEARNING ABOUT CURRENT EVENTS- WAS ASKED BY THE TEACHER TO NAME WHO THEY THOUGHT WAS THE GREATEST PERSON ALIVE.

THE CHILDREN RAISED THEIR HANDS-SHARING THE NAMES OF WELL KNOWN POLITICAL OR RELIGIOUS LEADERS, AND OTHERS WHO HAD A STRONG AND POSITIVE IMPACT IN THE WORLD.

BUT ONE BOY, WHEN CALLED UPON, NAMED JESUS AS THE GREATEST. THE TEACHER AGREED WITH THE BOY IN PRINCIPLE, BUT ADDED HE NEEDED TO NAME SOMEONE WHO WAS ALIVE TODAY.

THE BOY RESPONDED BY INSISTING THAT HE BELIEVED JESUS IS STILL ALIVE-EVEN THOUGH NO ONE CAN SEE HIM OR TOUCH HIM.

ANOTHER STORY ABOUT FAITH TAKES PLACE DURING THE COLD WAR, AND INVOLVES A MAN WHO WENT TO THE U.S.S.R. TO WRITE ABOUT THE COMMUNIST PARTY. HE WAS A MARXIST HIMSELF AND ALSO AN ATHEIST.

WHILE HE WAS IN THE SOVIET UNION, HE FINISHED HIS STORY JUST AS THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH WAS GOING TO CELEBRATE EASTER.

MOSTLY OUT OF CURIOSITY THE MAN DECIDED TO ATTENDED THEIR EASTER SUNDAY SERVICE. HE WAS STARTLED AT THE END OF WORSHIP WHEN THE PRIEST PROCLAIMED: "THE LORD IS RISEN!" AND THE CONGREGATION SHOUTED BACK THE RESPONSE- "HE IS RISEN INDEED!"

WHAT MOVED THIS VISITOR IN PARTICULAR WAS THE JOY HE WITNESSED AMONG THE WORSHIPPERS. SO INSPIRING WAS THEIR WORSHIP THE ATHEIST FELT HIS HEART TURN TOWARDS GOD-AND THE SEEDS OF FAITH BLOSSOMED WITHIN HIM.

THESE ARE JUST A TWO STORIES ABOUT HOW FAITH IN CHRIST INSPIRES OR TRANSFORMS THOSE WHO ARE TOUCHED BY HIM. THERE ARE INDEED COUNTLESS MORE SIMILAR STORIES THAT CAN BE TOLD.

HOWEVER IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT CHRISTIANS, BY THEIR ACTIONS, OFTEN DEMONSTRATE HOW HARD IT IS AT TIMES TO LIVE OUT ONE'S BELIEF.

AN EXAMPLE OF THIS IS CHRIST'S CALL FOR US TO TRUST IN HIM, AND TO TAKE HIS YOKE SO HE CAN HELP US CARRY BURDENS, RATHER THAN TRYING TO DO IT ALONE.

HOW OFTEN WE STRIVE TO BALANCE THE WHOLE WEIGHT OF WORLD ON OUR SHOULDERS, INSTEAD OF SIMPLY DOING OUR PART AND TRUSTING GOD TO DO THE REST.

AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN FAITH AND ACTION CAN BE FOUND IN NEW YORK CITY.

THERE IS A LARGE STATUE ON FIFTH AVENUE IN FRONT OF THE RCA BUILDING, WHICH DEPICTS THE MYTHOLOGICAL FIGURE ATLAS, STRUGGLING TO BALANCE THE WORLD ON HIS BACK.

ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL IS LOCATED ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE STREET. AND INSIDE THE SANCTUARY THERE IS A MUCH SMALLER STATUE OF JESUS, WHO IS EASILY HOLDING THE WORLD IN THE PALM OF ONE HAND.

WHILE THE FAITH WITHIN US LOOKS TO JESUS, THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE THINK OR ACT AS IF WE FEAR ATLAS WILL LET GO AND DROP THE WORLD ON OUR SHOULDERS.

PERHAPS THIS LACK OF FAITH IS THE RESULT OF A FAILURE TO REALLY HEAR WHAT GOD IS SAYING. AND THIS IN TURN CAUSES US TO FAIL TO TRUST IN CHRIST'S PROMISE TO BE WITH US AND SEND THE HOLY SPIRIT TO GUIDE AND SUSTAIN US.

IT MAY HELP ENCOURAGE US TO THINK BACK TO THE FIRST EASTER AND REMEMBER TWO THINGS.

FIRST, THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS TRANSFORMED OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND THE FUTURE.

IN OTHER WORDS THE MEANING OF CHRIST'S EMPTY TOMB, HIS RESURRECTION IS THE LIGHT IN WHICH WE UNDERSTAND THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES AND HAVE THE NEW TESTAMENT.

IT IS WHAT MAKES THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH EXIST, AND IT PROVIDES US WITH HOPE THE KINGDOM OF GOD WILL PREVAIL AND WE HAVE SALVATION AND LIFE THROUGH JESUS. IN THIS SENSE EASTER IS NOT OVER-IT IS THE LENS THROUGH WHICH WE VIEW ALL OF LIFE.

THE SECOND THING TO REMEMBER IS THAT ON THE FIRST EASTER, NO ONE REALLY LISTENED TO OR BELIEVED THE GOOD NEWS ENOUGH TO LET GO OF FEAR.

FIRST SOME OF THE WOMEN AMONG CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS DASHED BACK FROM THE TOMB WITH THE NEWS JESUS IS RISEN. YET WONDER AND FEAR WAS ALSO WITHIN THEM.

AFTER HEARING THEM, SOME OF THE MALE DISCIPLES RUN TO TAKE A LOOK AND ARE FILLED WITH WONDER.

THEN IN LUKE'S GOSPEL, THAT SAME AFTERNOON A COUPLE OF DISCIPLES ARE WALKING HOME TO EMMAUS, FROM JERUSALEM.

A MAN APPROACHES THE PAIR AND WALKS WITH THEM, ASKING ABOUT THEIR CONVERSATION. THEY TELL THE STRANGER EVERYTHING THAT HAD HAPPENED CONCERNING JESUS' DEATH.

THEN, THEY ADD THAT SOME OF THE WOMEN AMONG THEM CAME WITH NEWS THAT HE HAD RISEN FROM THE DEAD. NEXT, THE STRANGER SPEAKS TO THEM ABOUT WHAT SCRIPTURE SAYS CONCERNING THE MESSIAH.

HE ALSO JOINS THEM FOR DINNER-BUT DISAPPEARS AFTER BLESSING AND BREAKING A LOAF OF BREAD. THE EMMAUS ROAD PAIR REALIZE THE STRANGER WAS JESUS AND HURRY BACK TO JERUSALEM WITH THE GOOD NEWS, ONLY TO BE TOLD BY THE OTHERS- THE LORD IS RISEN.

NOT LONG AFTER THE GOOD NEWS IS EXCHANGED BETWEEN THEM, AND MARVELED AT BY ALL, JESUS HIMSELF SUDDENLY STANDS AMONG THEM. BUT RATHER THAN JOYOUSLY RECEIVING HIM, HIS FOLLOWERS ARE ALL AFRAID AND FILLED WITH DISBELIEF.

INDEED THEY ARE MORE PREPARED TO BELIEVE THEY ARE SEEING A GHOST THAN THE ONE WHOM THEY HAD JUST CONFESSED HAD RISEN FROM THE DEAD.

IT IS NO WONDER THAT JESUS GENTLY SCOLDED THEM FOR BEING TROUBLED AND DOUBTFUL AT THE SIGHT OF HIM. AND YET HE FELT COMPELLED TO PROVE THE SOLIDITY OF HIS BODY BY EATING SOMETHING.

OH THOSE FOOLISH, FLAWED, FEARFUL, DISCIPLES- MEN AND WOMEN BOTH! HOW COULD THEY HAVE NOT BELIEVED WHAT THEIR EYES SAW AND EARS HEARD?

AND YET, IN ALL FAIRNESS TO OUR ANCESTORS IN THE FAITH- CAN WE REALLY EXPECT THAT WE WOULD DO MUCH BETTER?

LET'S FACE IT- IF JESUS SUDDENLY APPEARED IN THIS SANCTUARY OR ANY WHERE TODAY OR ANY DAY THERE WOULD MOST LIKELY BE A VARIETY OF REACTIONS.

SOME PEOPLE MIGHT THINK IT WAS GREAT SPECIAL EFFECTS, A KIND OF HOLOGRAM PROJECTION THAT LOOKED REAL. SOME MIGHT THINK THEY ARE SEEING THINGS THAT ARE NOT REALLY THERE.

OTHERS MIGHT THINK THEY ARE SEEING A GHOST, AND SOME ASSUME THEY HAD FALLEN ASLEEP FOR A FEW MOMENTS- AND HAD BEGUN TO DREAM. AND THERE COULD ALSO BE SOME WHO BELIEVE JESUS IS REALLY PRESENT.

BUT IF HE DID NOT ACCOMPANY US OUTSIDE THE BUILDING- HOW MANY OF US WOULD ACTUALLY TELL SOMEONE NOT PRESENT WHAT ABOUT THE APPEARANCE?

OF COURSE NONE OF US REALLY KNOW HOW WE WOULD ACTUALLY REACT—FEARFUL, DOUBTFUL, DISBELIEVING, OR BELIEVING- UNLESS WE EXPERIENCED JESUS- IN THE FLESH, APPEARING AMONG US.

THE POINT IS- WE OFTEN ARE TOO CRITICAL OF THOSE WHO KNEW JESUS BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER, HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

BUT RATHER THAN BEING DISAPPOINTED IN THEIR LACK OF PERCEPTION AND FAITH IN JESUS, WE OUGHT TO BE THANKFUL. YES, THANKFUL THAT THEY WHO SAW, AND HEARD, AND TOUCHED JESUS IN THE FLESH-STRUGGLED WITH BELIEVING IN HIS RESURRECTION-EVEN AFTER CONFESSING IT WAS TRUE.

OUR GRATITUDE IS INSPIRED BY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT WE ARE NO BETTER OR WORSE THAN THEY. LET'S FACE IT, BOTH CHRIST'S ORIGINAL FOLLOWERS AND WE WHO HAVE COME MUCH, MUCH LATER HAVE ADVANTAGES OVER ONE ANOTHER.

THE FIRST FOLLOWERS-HAD ANGELIC MESSENGERS, AN EMPTY TOMB, AND FINALLY MET JESUS IN THE FLESH AFTER HIS RESURRECTION.

WE, ON THE OTHER HAND, WHILE LACKING ALL OF THAT EVIDENCE, HAVE THE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPELS, EPISTLES, AND BOOK OF ACTS.

THUS JESUS' FIRST DISCIPLES AND SUBSEQUENT DISCIPLES, HAVE REASONS TO BELIEVE IN HIM, AND THE TRUTH ABOUT HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

IT IS EQUALLY TRUE THAT THEY AND WE STRUGGLE WITH DOUBT ABOUT THE FACTS WE CLAIM TO BELIEVE. WHAT THEN DOES THAT MAKE US? – IT MAKES US ORDINARY, FLAWED, STRUGGLING HUMAN BEINGS.

IT MAKES US CHILDREN OF GOD WHO CONFESS FAITH ONE MOMENT, ONLY TO BECOME STARTLED, FRIGHTEN OR CONFUSED, OR DOUBTING IN THE NEXT MOMENT.

IF SUCH A THING HASN'T HAPPENED TO YOU YET, DON'T WORRY ODDS ARE VERY GOOD THAT IT WILL-- SOONER OR LATER.

SO ONE THING WE CAN LEARN FROM THE FIRST DISCIPLES-IS THAT THOSE MEN AND WOMEN DID AN AMAZING THING IN SPITE OF THEIR FEAR, GRIEF, CONFUSION, AND DISBELIEF.

WHAT WAS IT THEY DID? THEY KEPT GATHERING TOGETHER WITH ONE ANOTHER, INSTEAD OF SCATTERING IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS NEVER TO BE SEEN IN ONE ANOTHER'S COMPANY AGAIN.

THIS IS SIGNIFICANT IN THAT EVEN WHEN DOUBTFUL BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER CHRIST'S RESURRECTION THESE FOLLOWERS OF HIS COULD NOT CONVINCED THEMSELVES THAT THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH JESUS WEREN'T REAL.

THEY WERE CONTINUALLY DRAWN TO JESUS AND ONE ANOTHER EVEN AS THEY STRUGGLED TO TAKE IN EVERY THING THAT HAPPENED.

THIS CAN BE A POWERFUL MODEL FOR US-TO REMEMBER. AND ALSO THAT GOD WELCOMES THE DOUBTERS AS MUCH AS THE FAITHFUL.

AND WHILE IT IS TRUE JESUS SCOLDED HIS DISCIPLES AND OTHERS FOR UNBELIEF, WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT A REPRIMAND IS NOT REJECTION.

THE PURPOSE OF A REPRIMAND IS CORRECTION, AND WHEN IT COMES FROM THE LORD IT IS ALWAYS OUT OF LOVE FOR US.

LET US TAKE COMFORT IN REMEMBERING THAT WHEN WE STRUGGLE WITH FAITH OR UNBELIEF-THE GOSPEL STORIES REMIND US WE ARE IN GOOD COMPANY.

FURTHERMORE WE ARE SHOWN JESUS WISHES US HIS PEACE NO MATTER WHERE WE ARE IN BELIEF OR COMMITMENT.

THIS IS THE PEACE OF HIS RESURRECTED PRESENCE AND POWER, AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM AND BELIEVE IN HIM EVEN WITH ONLY A SPARK OF FAITH.

TRULY, EASTER GIVES US THE ASSURANCE OF PEACE AND HIS PRESENCE WITHIN US EVERY DAY, BECAUSE IT IS THE POINT IN TIME WHEN THE EFFECTS OF HUMAN SIN BEGAN TO BE REVERSED.

IT IS THE REASON WE CAN TRUST IN GOD'S MERCY TO FORGIVE US AND WE RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT TO CALM OUR FEARS AND STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH.

PRAISE GOD FOR THE LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS WE ARE SHOWN AND THE BLESSINGS WE ARE GIVEN IN CHRIST.

LET US PRAY: DEAR LORD, WHEN WE ARE FRIGHTENED, HELP US TO REMEMBER YOUR PROMISES AND SEEK THE STRENGTH OF YOUR SPIRIT.

WHEN WE ARE PERPLEXED, HELP US TO SEEK YOUR WORD AND TRUST YOUR WAY. WHEN WE ARE FULL OF DOUBT, HELP US TO RECEIVE THE ASSURANCE YOU ARE THERE TO SUPPORT US.

AS YOU TRANSFORMED THE FIRST DISCIPLES FROM THEIR DOUBTS, QUESTIONS, AND FEARS—TO JOY, NEW INTIMACY WITH YOU AND FAITH, WE PRAY YOU WILL DO THE SAME FOR US, AS OFTEN AS WE NEED. THROUGH CHRIST OUR LORD WE PRAY. AMEN

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