

St. Luke 24:36-47

Dear Friends in Christ,

George A. Buttrick was a noted preacher, author and lecturer who died in 1980. He wrote:

When he does die, the undertaker strives to make it appear that he has not died: he dresses him in a (suit), and lays him in a narrow box as if he were asleep, even though a man does not usually sleep in a (suit) in a narrow box. There is a funeral, for, unfortunately for our evasions, the man has died: "Too bad about So-and-so. But let's not think about it!" So we run to our familiar hiding place in the sensate world. And the cynic calls religion an "escape!" (Appeared in *The Christian Communications Laboratory*, 1986.)

So, we're in the third Sunday of Easter. Amazing how everything has "flown" by since the beginning of this year, isn't it? And the return of warmer days and more excursions removes the grip of winter tension. Buttrick was right, and it's a fair warning: "So we run to our familiar hiding place in the sensate world." He has a point when it comes to the desire to escape realities.

I'd like for you to consider with me . . .

### **THE POINTS WE CANNOT AFFORD TO MISS**

#### **I. Unearthly Peace!**

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. (vss. 36-37)

*Peace to you!* Christ brings peace. And so, as we considered last week, everyone runs for peace with this world. The "Can't we all just get along?" peace. The peace that has never been and will never be. And then, the words of Jesus that should get our every attention: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (Jn. 14:27)

What does the world really give? Hatred of the Christ. War and terrorists. A government obsessed with everyone's right to believe whatever they want - unless, of course, you're a "Christian." Conflict and tension, distrust and fear. And - guess what? - the grave continues to gobble-up humans and their death defying thinking.

Again and again, the *Peace to you!* Jesus gives is peace between God and sinful, undeserving humans. Because, you see, the issue is death - earthly and eternal. Because, you see, death is not normal. It's awful. And the fact is, we're dying. The only difference between those who are presently battling with a specific terminal illness and us is this: those with a specific terminal illness have a fair idea of how much time they have. We don't. But make no mistake about it: We're all terminal and we all have a specific amount of time. Why would anyone think differently?

I can't cite the author, but I have kept this insight for years:

"Death seems to have a mysterious air about it. Some people fear it, others are ready to die...but not yet, and of course there are those who wish death would knock soon. The certainty that someday we will die and the mystery of how we will die generates fear.

"Publius (a member of the ancient Roman Consul) wrote in the first century B.C., 'The fear of death is more to be dreaded than death itself.' He had a point."

And so, once more: The peace Jesus gives is **unearthly** peace! It is the peace that says God loves us, forgives us our sin, and has secured eternal life for us through Jesus Christ. It's the peace that never ends and never changes. It is the peace that is not gobbled up by the grave!

## II. Making Life Different.

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures... (vss. 44-45)

Don't you find it incredible that in the roughly three years these disciples walked with Jesus, heard His words, observed His miracles - don't you find it incredible that in those years they heard Him say "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (Lk. 9:22) - don't you find it incredible that after all that, they really didn't understand His Word?

But I'll tell you something even more incredible - something so many of you already know. It's the nice "church folks" of our day who ease into a nice, comfortable membership without ever really making Christ's Word their business! Oh, they might get to the Portals of Prayer, but that's about the end of it. And it's the nice, honey flavored pastors whose efforts to teach the Word are minimal to none. And when life flip flops - as life always does somewhere - that nice comfortable church membership doesn't carry such too far. Indeed, there are a lot of nice "church folks" who like to play church. Jesus wants us to live it.

You can't miss it! These disciples were upset and filled with turmoil and conflict. Jesus didn't direct them to get in touch with their inner feelings. He didn't hand them some thought provoking insights, books or CD's about life from some "thinker" or "scholar" of the day. No! He says, again: "These are my words (His Words! God's Word!) that I spoke to you while I will still with you." And the source for them to pursue? What was the source?? Jesus says, "written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms". The Scripture is the source. Specifically, the Old Testament Scripture.

And it's the same for us, with the addition of the New Testament. If we would spend one-fourth of the time we spend running after this world and it's "whatever" - if we would spend one-fourth of that time growing in the Word of God - life would be far more meaningful.

## III. The Issue That Never Changes.

And (He) said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (vss. 46-47)

We've heard people charge that the Church is boring - it's always the same old message. But you know something? It's the same old world. It's the same sirens that run the streets - the same news items reporting cruelty, dilemma, intrigue, tragedy, perversion with occasional smatterings of a nice moment here and there - the same homes we exit and enter each day with their same comforts and dramas - the same cycles of living and doing and dying.

I'll take the same old message, if you don't mind. As Jesus said, "that repentance and forgiveness of sin should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

I like that. I want that. The reality that God enables me to see my sin, confess it, then confronts me with forgiveness. I want that reality that Christ overcame sin and death for me and promises eternal life. I want the assurance that I will go to heaven when I die. And I hope you do, too!

Long ago, Isaiah recorded this for our comfort:

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.'" (Is. 57:15)

This is us: the contrite and lowly in spirit. Hit with the reality and consequence of sin every day. But recognizing the One Who has overcome sin and death for us.

We're not here to argue or debate anything with God. His Word is clear. We have been given everything for life and salvation in the resurrected Christ. And just as He presented Himself to those first disciples and they touched Him and ate with Him, so in the Word and the Sacrament He presents Himself to us with every assurance of forgiveness and heaven.

I don't know what your agenda is for the remainder of this day or the week to come. But I pray God helps us to make all He gives us in Christ weave itself into our moment by moment existence - and, most of all, into eternal life. These are points we can't afford to miss.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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*St. Luke 24:36-47: “The Points We Cannot Afford to Miss”*

*I. Unearthly Peace!*

*II. Making Life Different.*

*III. The Issue That Never Changes.*

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