

*EASTER SUNDAY*

*March 27, 2016*

*Luke 24:44-47: **“He Opened Their Minds  
to Understand the Scriptures”***

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
2155 North Oakland Avenue  
Decatur, Illinois 62526*

St. Luke 24:44-47

Dear Friends in Christ,

When I began writing the sermon for this Easter Sunday I almost instantly recalled a moment from some years ago when I walked into a room where a mother was holding her lifeless baby. And that's it: The ultimate, shocking reality humans fear, despise, try to cover-up, ignore while pursuing the day-to-day issues of life. **THE END!**

One of the saddest thing we can do is build a monument to the dust of this earth only to have it swept away by a handful of work and play days. And if any one here, this morning, finds the constant reminders of sin, dying and death and Christ's very purpose for entering this world too much, too boring, too depressing, too repetitive...well...what do you plan to do about the too much, too boring, too depressing, too repetitive sin, dying and death of war, illness, aging, hatred, lying, cheating, stealing, hunger, lovelessness, abuse, human exploitation, job uncertainty and the corruption that permeates every facet of life? So, tell me: Where are you going to go....if the Word of God is too much?

We want what Jesus gives on Easter Sunday . . .

### ***HE OPENED THEIR MINDS TO UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURES***

#### **I. Easter Brings Us To The Word.**

Lewis Smedes was a reformed Christian writer who died in 2002. In his book, "Mere Morality" which was written in 1989, he said this, in part:

The credibility gap that once alienated the public from people in high places now seems to separate us from one another in all walks of life... In the words of a *Time* magazine essay, ours is "a huckstering, show-bizzy world, jangling with hype, hullabaloo, and hooley...". After a while, people tend to expect not to hear the truth anymore; in 1976, a national poll showed that 69 percent of Americans believed that the country's leaders had, over the last decade, consistently lied to the people.

69%? That's all? We all struggle with the truth. The Psalmist said it: "I said in my alarm, 'All mankind are liars.'" (Ps. 116:11) And I confess, my stomach churns whenever I consider some of my own thought processes. So let's go to these words from Jesus:

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...

If it's all the same to you, I'm hanging on to the "boring", "depressing", "repetitive" truths of Scripture.....period!!! I want to daily hold on to the truth: "The wages of sin is death..." (Rom. 6:23a) I want to daily hold on to the truth, "...the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 23b) I'm determined to grow in my understanding of both Old and New Testaments, what they say about humanity, sin, suffering, dying, death and eternity. I mean, you do understand that the statement, "Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." is a reference to the Old Testament...right? Both Testaments are where God meets with us.

Funny, sad and tragic, isn't it, that so much of the church wants to see Christ as the architect for a happy, peaceful heaven on earth? The Scriptures that define the church don't say that! They don't teach that. They address sin, death and hell and the way out! Jesus said, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever." (Jn. 6:51) And He said to the self-righteous church of that time which wanted its heaven on earth - and He says to the liberal, works

righteous church of our time that wants its heaven on earth: "...You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins." (Jn. 8:23-24) That's Scripture. And it still holds true.

Easter brings us to the Word . . .

## II. The Resurrection.

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (not human wants and thinking, but the Scriptures!), and said to them, "thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead...". (vss. 45,46)

***Rise from the dead! From the dead.*** That is the issue of life. Everything we do is defined by an *if*...if we live to see another hour, day, week, month, year. *If*. We are going to die. As Socrates said, "No one knows whether death...may not be the greatest of all good, but men in their fear apprehend it to be the greatest evil." That from an unbeliever! Well, let's be honest: Left to ourselves death is the most dreaded of all earthly events. It destroys, separates, brings pain and grief for those left behind. Samuel Johnson told his horror of the death of a friend in these words: "At the sight of this last conflict, I felt a sensation never known to me before: a confusion of passions, an awful stillness of sorrow, a gloomy terror without a name." Well, I'll give it a name: ***Wages***. That's its name: ***Wages - The Wages of Sin!***

But in Christ there is the reality, the joy, the comfort He promises His people: "Because I live, you also will live." (Jn. 14:19b) And, as Christ taught, "Whoever believes...will have eternal life." (Jn. 3:16)

Whatever investments we make in this world - whatever lives we live and sacrifices we make - if they are not made in the context of Christ's love, forgiveness of our sin and resurrection they will be lost and forgotten. They are but a passing moment to be washed away in the ocean of time and eternity.

It is as Paul writes:

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain...For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. (I Cor. 15:13, 14, 16, 17)

## III. Repentance and Forgiveness.

But listen to what our text says:

"Thus it is written, that 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)

A Lutheran pastor by the name of John Vannorsdall wrote:

If God raised Jesus from the dead, why didn't God fix him up? Why scars? Why the print of nails that you could feel with your fingers? Can it be that the Gospel words (are) saying to us in our waiting: "You will not see Jesus Christ unless you see the wounds"?

I couldn't agree more. And unless you understand that the wounds are there because of your sin and my sin - unless you understand this - the life, suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus make no sense. None. To repeat:

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith (our faith!) is futile and (we!) are still in (our) sins. (I Cor. 15:16,17)

Got it? The focus of the Scriptures, from beginning to end; the total focus of Christ's church - not the liberal church, which is an overflow of "jangling with hype, hullabaloo, and hooey" - the focus is the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Christ Who overcame sin, death and hell for us! The reality of the sin within each person is to be considered day by day. And, as a result, the One Who paid for that sin is to be considered, worshiped and adored, day by day. We confess with Paul:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (I Cor. 15:20-22)

As part of ***the end times remnant church*** we daily live with and witness to the glorious truth: "For our sake (God) made (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21) What the church celebrates isn't a marriage seminar, a positive thinking session, our happiness and joy ***with*** this world. It celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ who won eternal life for us! Because He lives, we will live - forever!

Now we understand - only from the Scriptures! Christ is risen, He is risen, indeed! Blessed Easter!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott