

What Is Our Missionary Message and Its Meaning?

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at Christchurcheastbay.org. Good morning.

My name is Hannah Sue and I am part of the North Berkeley Community Group. Today's scripture is a reading from the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 24, verses 32 through 53.

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? They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem.

There they found the eleven and those with them assembled together and saying, it is true, the Lord has risen and appeared to Simon. Then the two told what had happened on the way and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

[1 : 0 9] While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, peace peace be with you. They were startled and frightened thinking that they saw a ghost.

He said to them, why are you troubled and why do doubts rise in your minds? 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. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, do you have anything here to eat?

They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it in their presence. 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.

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures. He told them, this is what is written. The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

[2 : 2 3] You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.

Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God. This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Christ. Good morning, Christ Church. What a joy it was to celebrate Easter last Sunday and to continue that celebration today as we just enter into the joy and the fullness of joy that Christ is risen from the dead.

For the sake of time, we are just going to jump right in. We are picking back up where we left off at the end of Luke's gospel last week. These are his final words of his story of Jesus that he has given to us.

[3 : 32] And what we see here in this story is that the resurrected Jesus, this is Easter Sunday night. Okay, last week we looked at Easter Sunday morning, afternoon, and evening.

This is Easter Sunday night. And the resurrected Jesus is inviting us. He's challenging us along with these disciples to do two things.

These are two things the resurrected Jesus really, really wants for his people, for his disciples, is to doubt your doubts and to proclaim the biblical gospel.

So first of all, what does it mean to doubt your doubts? Think about it. How would you react if the person that you saw die three days earlier?

And you didn't just see them die like in their sleep. You saw them die in the most horrible, grotesque way. You saw them die three days earlier, and now here they are unmistakably alive and standing before you.

[4 : 50] How would you react to that? No wonder Jesus' first words to these disciples is, shalom, peace be with you, because their reality has been shattered.

They are, it says that they're startled and that they're terrified. And they're thinking to themselves, this must be a ghost. This must be an apparition. It must be some sort of disembodied spirit that's making a momentary visit to us right now.

And Jesus says to them in verse 38, he says to them, why are you troubled and why do doubts rise in your minds?

Doubts. And that word doubts in Greek is dialogizmi, which is where we get the word dialogue. And I just want to clarify that Jesus is not against them thinking.

He's not against us questioning and deliberating and reasoning. Right? The life of the mind where we dialogue within ourselves and we puzzle out all these enigmas and riddles with logic.

[5 : 59] If you know anything about the Old Testament, anything about the teaching of Jesus, there's a very strong and clear link between our head and our heart. So what is Jesus challenging in these first skeptics?

What he sees them doing in both their head and their heart is they're disputing an inconvenient truth that does not fit the dominant paradigm.

Right? Because we all know what they knew, that dead people stay dead. And that that is an ironclad rule without exceptions.

And so here they are. They're interpreting the data of Jesus standing before them. And they're interpreting that data within the worldview categories that they have.

They're interpreting that data within the plausibility structures that they know. And so they think to themselves, well, this is either an immaterial spirit or it's some sort of revived corpse like Lazarus who had been, you know, temporarily brought back to life and would one day die again.

[7 : 08] Those are basically the two options in their mind. And Jesus is patiently helping them to realize that he's neither this nor that. And he says to them in verse 39, he says, Now why does Jesus present to them his hands and his feet?

Because he's saying, look, this body that you see before your eyes, this body is continuous with my crucified body.

Right? Here are the marks of the wounds where the iron nails went in and they fastened me to my cross. And these, by the way, are also the signs of my victory over sin and death.

And then Jesus goes on and in verse 41 it says, While they still did not believe, they still did not believe, because of joy and amazement, he asked them, Do you have anything here to eat?

And they gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it in their presence. And I imagine when that happened and Jesus swallowed that fish, he said, Ta-da! Because think of all the sadness.

[8 : 20] Think of all the heaviness. Think of all the grief that they've been in the last few days. This is a moment of incredible comic relief. The resurrection is funny. It's funny because everything's changed.

And Jesus is giving them convincing, irrefutable proofs that he's alive with a real material body that has flesh and bones that you can see and touch, that bears the scars, that eats the fish.

And yet this is a new body. It's a glorified body that's full of the life of the age to come. It's a body that's no longer subject to decay and death.

It's a body that's incorruptible and immortal. It's a body that is, in fact, the first fruits of God's new creation. Right? This is a transphysical body that seemingly can pass through grave clothes.

It can walk through walls. It can appear and disappear at will. This is crazy, y'all. Isn't it? I mean, if you're a Christian and you believe this, this is crazy.

[9 : 30] But what if it's true? And if it's true, then you need a new worldview to map out this new reality.

Right? When you think about all the popular beliefs of folks that we know here in the Bay Area, they kind of boil down to a few things, right? Some people say, well, this life is all there is.

And when you die, that's it. You just live life the best that you can. And other people say, you know, if there is a God, he's remote. And we don't really have to deal with them very much.

And other people say, well, all religions are basically alike. Just be good and love other people. But if Jesus Christ is the resurrected Son of God, then none of those beliefs are true.

If Jesus has been raised from the dead, then this life is not all there is. If Jesus has been resurrected, then either you have to deal with him or live in denial about him.

[10 : 36] If Jesus has been raised from the dead, then salvation can only be through him because no one else has come back from the dead. You see, the resurrection is this paradigm-shattering historical event that forces us to embrace a brand new worldview.

And Jesus is engaging these first skeptics with incredible patience. He's just working with their unbelief. And he gives them the evidence.

He gives them the data. He gives them time and opportunity to explore the evidence and consider the data. And then at some point, Jesus is basically like, look, your doubts about me right now are real.

But I am more real. And this is what he says to Thomas, right, in the Gospel of John. He says to doubting Thomas after giving him all the proofs that he needed.

He finally challenged Thomas and he said, Thomas, stop doubting and believe. Thomas, stop being an unbeliever. Become a believer. Stop trusting in all the things that you supposedly know.

[11 : 46] And start putting your faith in this strange new reality. And what we find in the New Testament is the apostles working out this new model of knowledge, this new structure and future of the universe, and how that bears on life in the present.

So if you're here today and you're exploring Christianity, I know this is strange. I know it's absolutely weird. But I just invite you to explore the evidence and consider the data and to wrestle with the notion that if Jesus is really, truly risen from the dead, then that means everything he said is true.

And that means that he has the power to fulfill every single promise he ever made. And it also means that he's the one person in all of human history who's worth following and trusting and worshiping with all your heart and with all your life.

So I want to encourage you to take the risk to doubt your doubts. And to call out to Jesus if he's there and ask him, if you're real, if you're alive, reveal yourself to me.

And if you're there and you're full of this new and abundant life of God's new age, his new creation, would you fill me with that life? And if you're a Christian, if you believe in your heart that God actually raised him from the dead, that he really walked out of the tomb, that he was seen by hundreds of people, that he talked to them, then as we said last week, everything is going to be okay.

[13 : 15] And the reason we know everything is going to be okay is that the resurrected body of Jesus is the beginning of God's new creation. Jesus, with his resurrected body, is God's pledge that the whole material order is going to be resurrected.

There are plenty of other religions that talk about a future afterlife. They talk about a non-material reality that will be a consolation for the world that we've lost.

But Christianity, as far as I know, is the only religion that says not just there's going to be resurrected bodies, but there's going to be a whole resurrected world that's going to be cleansed of all sin and death and cleansed of all evil and sorrow.

And friends, have you worked out what that means? If that's true, do you know what it means? It means that you no longer have to have FOMO. Right?

You no longer have to live in the fear of missing out anymore because you're not going to miss out on anything. The resurrection means not only a restoration of the life that you are going to lose, but what the resurrection means is the gift of the life that you never had but that you always wanted.

[14 : 39] We have the hope of a new bodily existence in a newly remade world, and Jesus' resurrected body is the preview of coming attractions. The apostle Paul says in Romans 6, he says, For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again.

Death no longer has mastery over him. And he says in 1 Thessalonians 4, he says, For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

And these disciples there on Easter night are staring at Jesus, and they're staring at the prototype of incorruptible, immortal physicality that's awaiting every single one of us.

Can you imagine waking up in the morning and feeling awesome? Because your resurrected body is like Jesus' awesome resurrected body.

It's a body that will never die again. And it's a body where death no longer has mastery over you. No more deterioration. No more getting old.

[15 : 48] No more slow decline. No more pain. No more debilitating injuries. No more disease. None of that.

Now, some of you in your teens and your 20s are looking at me like, What are you talking about? And I'm just telling you, when you hit the age of 46, everything will start falling apart. But you see, if this is true, if this is true, it's no wonder that the early Christians were absolutely fearless and absolutely courageous.

It's no wonder they stopped living for just this life and this age and started living for the life and the age to come because they knew this is what is going to happen to us.

And therefore, we can take courageous risks to live like Jesus. We can take courageous risks to live this spirit-filled, Jesus-shaped life because we know he's going to come back and he's going to establish the kingdom of God and he's going to make everything new.

So what do we have to lose? What do we have to lose? So Jesus is saying to those disciples who he's going to send out as apostles in that upper room on Easter Sunday night, he says to them, Doubt your doubts.

[17 : 04] Doubt your doubts. But then he says to them, he says, Proclaim the biblical gospel. Proclaim the biblical gospel. And this is where we read in verse 44.

He says, 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. And then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures.

Right? We went over that last week. So I won't cover new territory. But what Jesus begins to say is, Look, here is the biblical gospel.

Here's the good news that flows out of the Bible and out of the way that I've fulfilled the message and the story of the Bible in my death and resurrection. And he gives them this multifaceted diamond called the gospel.

And I want us to look just for a minute at some of the different facets of that diamond's brilliance. He says, First of all, I'm sending you, my disciples, out into the world with a mission to take the good news, to take the gospel event to the world.

[18 : 12] And that gospel event is his crucifixion and his resurrection. He says in verse 46, He told them, This is what is written, The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.

What Jesus is telling us here is that the gospel, the good news is not a philosophical idea, and it's not moral advice. The gospel is a historical event.

It's a historical event when the Messiah took our place. He died the death we should have died. He bore all of our cursedness and our condemnation on his cross instead of us.

And he atoned for our sins. He became sin. He embraced death so that he might triumph and conquer over these things.

And the resurrection, as we said last week, is the proof that these sufferings and the substitutionary death of the Messiah was vindicated and approved by God.

[19 : 11] The resurrection is the proof that Jesus' cry on that cross, it is finished, that in that moment, he actually paid our cosmic debt in full once for all.

He won redemption for us in that moment. That's what the resurrection tells us. And he says to his apostles, you are the original eyewitnesses of this historical event, and I am sending my church with the mission to share this gospel event.

But then Jesus goes on, and he tells them not only about the gospel event, he says your mission has to do with the gospel offer. The gospel offer of the forgiveness of sins. Verse 47.

And repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. The central meaning of salvation is the forgiveness of our sins.

Jesus says what people need primarily is not so much to be instructed, it's not so much to be improved or to be made better or to be reformed or to be topped off in some way.

[20 : 17] What we most need is to be forgiven. We need to have those sins that are separating us from God to be removed.

And the good news here is that though we cannot remove our sins for ourselves, God himself is able and he's willing to remove them. And there's absolutely no greater gift than this full and perfect pardon that reconciles us with the creator God.

That transforms us from being a rebel into being a son or a daughter of the father. Right? That brings us into the family of God. That puts us into a right relationship with God.

That brings us at home and at rest in the healing heart of the love of God. That enables us to speak to God in the most intimate of terms. Abba, Father. That's what the forgiveness of sins means.

That's the gospel offer. Jesus says, you've got to go out with my mission and take out the gospel event and the gospel offer.

[21 : 25] And then he says, you've got to give people the gospel demand. The gospel demand, which is repentance. The resurrected Jesus says, you can't have the gospel offer of forgiveness without the gospel demand of repentance.

Repentance. Verse 47. It's a word in Greek. It's metanoia, which means to change your mind. See, Jesus gives both the invitation of forgiveness and the challenge of repentance.

He says, if you want God to turn from your sins and forgiveness, you've got to turn from your sins and repentance. You can't have reconciliation with God unless we turn from our rebellion against God.

There is no possibility of peace without the decommissioning of weapons and the laying down of our arms before God and surrendering all of our self-seeking and all of our self-determination.

Right? Metanoia, change your mind, means that sinners will not be forgiven if they persist in clinging to their old mind and to the old life of sin that flows from the old mind.

[22 : 32] You need a completely new mind. Jesus goes on and he says, it's not just about the gospel event and the gospel offer and the gospel demand, but he says there's also the gospel authority.

Verse 47, he says, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all the nations beginning at Jerusalem. There's an amazing passage at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles where we see Jesus' disciples going out in his name.

And it says in Acts chapter 4, it says, salvation is found in no one else, but there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. Now perhaps you've heard Christians say this.

You'll hear Christians say, preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words. Has anyone ever heard that? Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words.

That is both well-meaning but also wrong-headed. Jesus would say, if you don't use words, especially the word of my name, you're not giving people the opportunity to call upon the only name that God has given whereby anyone can be saved.

[23 : 55] In his name is all about the authority of Jesus. Jesus. And also in his name is a summons for us to pray.

Right? Jesus says in the gospel of John chapter 14, he says, I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Father may be glorified in the Son and you may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it.

And what he's saying about sharing the gospel in his name and in his authority is he's saying we need to call upon the name. And we need to call upon his authority, the authority of the resurrected Lord to advance the gospel here in Berkeley and in the East Bay.

We need to call upon him to glorify the Father by bringing people to his Son. And if we don't pray like that, if we don't call on his name, if we don't seek his authority, we shouldn't be surprised if it's not happening very much.

See, Jesus sends them out with the gospel event, the gospel offer, the gospel demand, the gospel authority. And then he tells them the gospel audience.

[25 : 01] And he says the gospel audience is all the nations. And the word he uses here is he says, I'm sending you out to the ethnos, which is where we get the word ethnic.

And what he's saying, the resurrected Jesus is saying on Easter Sunday night, is he's saying this message and this movement is for the whole human race.

It's for the whole human family in all of its diverse multitude of tribes, nations, peoples, and languages. And what I'm sending you with is to transcend and to transform all of those ethnic cultural particularities to make them more fully the way God intended them to become.

Right? Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin, not just of this people or that people, but of the whole world. And therefore, Jesus is sending out his apostolic church as a missionary society for the whole world.

And this is why when you read the Acts of the Apostles, you read early church history, what does the church do? The church goes east to Persia and India. The church goes south to Africa.

[26 : 12] The church goes north to Eurasia. The church goes west to Greece and Italy and Spain and out beyond. And what they did when they got to these nations is they said to these nations, your understanding of God, your understanding of the world, your understanding of the world, your understanding of the world, your understanding of salvation is insufficient and it's incomplete.

And there's absolutely nothing in the New Testament that suggests that these nations can get along all right with the religions they already have. There's nothing to suggest in the New Testament that there's any other name other than Jesus' name by which people must be saved.

And so that's what compelled them to go out. And we tend in that story to focus on those amazing missionaries that went to the ends of the earth. Sometimes we forget those ordinary everyday Christians just like us.

They didn't go to the ends of the earth. They just went next door. And they said to their friends and neighbors and coworkers, come sit at my table. Come break bread with me.

And they engaged in simple conversations. Simple conversations that became serious conversations that became spiritual conversations. And they waited and they prayed and they trusted in God to open hearts and open doors where they were able at some point to share with them the unsearchable riches of Christ.

[27 : 40] The last thing Jesus tells his disciples about is not just the gospel event, gospel offer, gospel demand, gospel authority, gospel audience.

But he tells them about gospel power. And it's the power of the Holy Spirit. And he says to them in verse 49, he says, I'm going to send you what my Father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.

And when Jesus says that, he's telling Peter and James and John and all the rest, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, all of them, you are not yet fit to go with your own meager resources in all of your human weaknesses.

You must wait to be clothed with power from on high from the Holy Spirit. See, when you become a Christian, you receive the Holy Spirit, but each and every single one of us needs a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit and his power.

Right? All of us as a community, we need the fresh filling of the Holy Spirit if we're going to be a gospel-sharing, biblical gospel-proclaiming church. A church that neglects the Holy Spirit is going to be predictably ineffective in sharing the gospel.

[29 : 11] Because the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts us in the first place that we are sinners. And it's the Holy Spirit who opens blind eyes so that they can see that Jesus is the heaven-sent Savior that sinners need.

And it's the Holy Spirit who draws people to Jesus and enables them to repent and to believe. And it's the Holy Spirit who implants life into dead souls causing that miracle of regeneration, that miracle of new birth from above to take place.

And what Jesus is telling his disciples there on Easter Sunday night, and what he's telling us, is that if you think you can do any of this with your own power, without the Holy Spirit, you're crazy.

Imagine this moment. The resurrected Jesus on Easter Sunday night is standing before you telling you, doubt your doubts and go out to all the nations to proclaim the biblical gospel.

This is what we call the Great Commission. It's the one central, supreme, essential, non-negotiable task that Jesus has given to his church.

[30 : 37] It's a mission that's greater than any for-profit company. It's a mission that's greater than any non-profit organization. It's a mission that's greater than any government or military institution.

Why? Because it's a mission that the resurrected Jesus himself gave to his church. We all have our own, like, little passion projects, don't we?

Friends, this is the big passion project of our resurrected Lord. It's the one job that he's given us to do. Jesus came to procure salvation, but it's not much use procuring it unless he has a community that is willing to proclaim it.

Right? God has sent us to the Bay Area as a missionary society where the news of Jesus is so distorted. It's so misunderstood.

It's so caricatured. It's so, frankly, unknown. And like this little group of disciples there on Easter Sunday night who've been told by the resurrected Jesus to wait for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them, we are also being sent out where God has put us in the lives of people as his agents and as his messengers of good news.

[31 : 54] It's the most amazing privilege that you've ever been given. It's the most incredible responsibility that you'll ever have. We've been commissioned, just as they were, to proclaim to all different kinds of people among the nations, repentance and forgiveness of sins on the basis of the name of Jesus, who died and was raised to life according to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament and in the power of the Holy Spirit given to each one of us.

That's our job. That's our job. And the only way we'll do that is if we actually know and we come and meet with the risen and living Christ, which is what this table has meant for us to do.

So, friends, I invite you to just prepare your hearts as we come to this table. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.