

Looking for Jesus in All the Wrong Places

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[0 : 00] My name is David Short, I work as one of the ministers here at St. John's and it's nice to be back in the pulpit this morning. If you're visiting with us we're going to turn to that reading Luke 24 on page 85 near the back of the Bible.

And those of you who are first to get there, if you would take up your parish bulletin and turn to the third page inside. I just want to make a couple of comments before we begin the sermon.

Last week I wrote on the front of the bulletin that we had reached the financial target of the Legal Defence Fund. And as a leadership group at St. John's we did not want to let this pass without saying something about it.

And I want to say thanks to God and I want to say thank you to all of you who have given to this and have prayed about this. However, we also wanted to say that we have to be careful not to make the whole Anglican thing the main thing.

If we do that and we win the court case we'll feel smug and self-righteous. If we do it and we lose the court case we'll feel fearful and angry and do all sorts of strange things.

[1 : 24] So my message really, my notice this morning is that the big thing for us remains the mission of Jesus Christ here in Vancouver and around the world.

The mission of the Gospel. And that we need to pray that God would continue to move the Gospel through us to other people for his own sake.

Setting our own hearts on fire more and more and setting the hearts of others on fire for him. That's what it's about. So it looks like money but it's part of the mission.

Any questions? No. So let's put the bulletin away and open up the Bible to Luke 24. And I'm expecting someone to bring cake and balloons because we, after 10 months, have finally got to the last chapter of Luke's Gospel.

Actually, I'm a little sad to tell you the truth. I feel like we've been sailing over this ocean of good things. We've been dragging our hands in the water and all we've got is what's in our hands.

[2 : 27] And we've left so much untouched we need to go back and start again. We won't do that but I'd like to. Do you remember right from the start Dr. Luke said that salvation is a mighty reversal.

That Jesus comes as the Son of the Most High as a fragile baby. And he enters his ministry and the Kingdom of God comes and Jesus preaches that it's the humble who are exalted and those who exalt themselves are humbled.

That the Kingdom of God is about a massive and a mighty reversal. It's the unrighteous, the unclean who are forgiven.

And those who think they're righteous are sent away empty. And do you remember over the weeks we've learned that the reason for that is the world that we live in today is not the way that God made it in the beginning.

It still has vestiges of beauty but at the deepest level there is a disconnection with God. There's a rupture in our relationship with God which is impossible for us to fix.

[3 : 35] This month's Atlantic magazine cover issue is called How to Fix the World. I kid you not.

15 ideas for saving the world. A little light summer reading. And some of the ideas include teaching 18 year olds how to drink alcohol. I guess that's to stop binge drinking.

Paying artists. Privatising the seas. Replacing peacekeepers with private armies. It is published across the border.

I would just make that comment and say I don't think anyone seriously believes that these things are going to change the world.

And the reason the Bible keeps pushing on us and keeps coming to us in Luke's Gospel is because none of these things can turn the world upside down. That we were made by God to live in his

world.

[4 : 37] We were given all sorts of good things to love God and to use to serve him. And what we've done is the opposite. We take those good things he's given us and we begin to love those and to worship them and to give our lives to them.

The story of the Bible is the story of God turning things the right way up. of re-establishing his purposes of blessing. And Jesus Christ comes in this world to bring a new world, a different kingdom, a new creation.

And of all the reversals that we have seen in Luke's Gospel, the one greatest reversal is the resurrection. And that's why when we come to chapter 24, it is just so strange.

I know it's familiar. If you've been a Christian for a couple of years, it may not feel like this. But as we've read through Luke's Gospel, chapter 24 is completely alien. It goes a completely different direction than what you'd expect.

Let me give you an example. Only four chapters ago in chapter 20, Jesus spent more than half a chapter speaking about what the resurrection will be like and what it means.

[5 : 52] And it means that he will be raised to become Lord of all. There's none of that in chapter 24. The resurrection itself is not described. All we get is women carrying spices to the tomb, confused disciples who don't believe, and then two appearances of Jesus.

And I don't know about you, but I feel like as we've read through Luke, we come to this chapter expecting something much different. And I feel like one of the women carrying spices to a tomb. I feel like Cleopas and his friend walking away from Jerusalem. Think about it this way. Luke 24 all happens on one day, three events in one day.

But we know from volume two from Luke that Jesus appeared for 40 days, giving many proofs to many disciples. But here it's just three incidents, and Jesus only appears in two of them.

There's no hoopla. There's no fanfare. There's no lights and camera. The whole emphasis of the chapter seems to be moving in a different direction. You can see it from the structure of the chapter.

[7 : 01] There are three episodes, and while we're only going to do two this week, each of the episodes is shaped the same way. Each episode begins with disciples in confusion and bewilderment and fear and unbelief.

Each episode ends with disciples believing and joyful, and in the middle they are rebuked and taught the Bible. And it's almost as though our need is not to know the mechanics of the resurrection.

It's not to get all the facts straight before we move forward. The problem that Luke 24 addresses is that our hearts are cold and slow to believe.

It's not that the resurrection of Jesus creates faith in the scriptures. It's faith in the scriptures that brings us to believe the resurrection.

The whole of the revelation of God in scriptures and the resurrection of Jesus are not two separate things. They go together.

[8 : 04] And you cannot have faith in one without having faith in the other. So let's look at these two scenes and then we'll look at the third next week. And they all go together.

The first scene, verses 1 to 11. Last time I preached on this, I called this scene the original Spice Girls. And I can say it again because it's not on the internet yet.

I mean, you read this story, the idea that the early Christians invented the resurrection is just nonsense. The women go to the tomb expecting to find a dead body with all these spices prepared. What they're completely unprepared for is what happens next. The tomb is utterly empty and to add terror to their confusions, two angels appear and make this demand.

Let me put it in contemporary English. Why on earth are you looking for the living one among all these dead ones? What do you think you're doing? Now this is the angels, these angels that appeared at the beginning of Luke's Gospel, they now appear again and they're not happy.

[9 : 16] This is a rebuke. From heaven's perspective, the money and time the women have spent on spices is a complete waste. Now I don't want to be too tough on the women because there is not one single follower of Jesus in all the Gospels who expected Jesus to rise from the dead, who understood that Jesus was going to die for their sins and rise again.

And I don't know if you've thought about this. Imagine the crushing loneliness of being Jesus going up to Jerusalem and dying on a cross knowing that none of your followers understood what you were doing.

So the angels say to the women, why are you looking for the living one among the dead ones? And the point is, he is not just a dead man.

He is the son of the most high God. You can remember the echoes from chapter one. He will sit on the throne of his father Jacob forever. Of his kingdom, there will be no end.

Jesus has gone into death and out through death and out the other side. He has gone down into the dungeon of prison, into the deepest prison and he has overwhelmed death itself.

[10:35] As the risen Jesus says later on in the New Testament, fear not, he says. I am the first, I am the last, I am the living one, the permanently living one. I died, look at me, he says, I am alive forever and ever and I hold the keys of death and hell.

Now we could very profitably stop on this and spend a long time. I have had the enormous privilege just in the last couple of weeks of visiting those who are dying.

I will tell you to know that Jesus Christ is the living one who holds the keys of death and hell changes everything. It means that when we die, it is Christ with whom we have to deal, either as our saviour or as our judge.

His resurrection is relevant to every single human being whether you believe the resurrection or not. And the fact that he has died and walked through death and raised again from the dead means that he is able to walk with us through the valley of the shadow of death because he's been to the end and back.

And it means that as you and I experience death, Christ will hold our hand and come beside us and we need fear, no evil. There's much to say about this.

[11:53] We have to move on. Why are the angels so shocked? Verse 6. Remember how Jesus told you while he was still in Galilee, the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise and they remembered Jesus' words.

The angels are shocked because the women had the words of Jesus but they had forgotten them. They'd had the words of Jesus but they hadn't let the words of Jesus enter their hearts.

They had come to the tomb overwhelmed with their own needs and overwhelmed with their grief and they had missed the plain teaching of Jesus. And so much of what we do in church land is embalming dead bodies when we forget the plain words of Jesus.

We have to go back to the words of Jesus otherwise we're never going to make sense of ourselves or what God is doing. And heaven knows and the angels speak for heaven here that every word of Jesus Christ is the eternal truth from God.

Jesus himself said three chapters ago heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away. The fact that he has risen from the dead means every word of his proves true.

[13:11] Just remember the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins. There's more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than 99 righteous who need no repentance. You cannot serve God and money.

I've come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance. The way in which we come to meet the risen Jesus is by remembering his words. The resurrection means that he is the living one and the great reversal has begun.

Well then what about the second section verses 13 to 35? I've called this Jesus is the Redeemer. This is a story it's full of beauty and full of irony.

Did you notice that Cleopas and his friend are on a pilgrimage? It's the wrong pilgrimage. They're walking away from Jerusalem.

Since chapter 9 in Luke's gospel we've been on a pilgrimage towards Jerusalem and now as they walk the seven miles away from Jerusalem they are confused and they are disappointed and they are disillusioned.

[14:27] And the reason they are is because Jesus has not lived up to their expectations. which means their expectations were wrong.

And as they walk Jesus himself joins them in verse 15 and asks them what they're talking about. They don't recognise him not because he's a ghost and you can see through his body they don't recognise him because of their own spiritual blindness and their slowness of heart to believe.

And he says what are you talking about? And Cleopas says in verse 18 you must be the one single solitary person in all Jerusalem who doesn't really know what's going on.

I mean it's a great moment isn't it? You want to call out Cleopas it's Jesus. And then in verses 19 onwards we get the gospel according to Cleopas and he's got a good handle on the miracles of

Jesus but it's when he comes to the crucifixion that his disappointment sets in. verse 21 we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel but because he died he cannot do it. [15:39] This is very important. The great barrier and blockage to their faith is not the resurrection it's the death of Jesus on the cross.

what stops them believing is not just that they can't conceive of a resurrection but that the brutal death of Jesus does not fit their expectation of what a Messiah ought to do. Messiahs they take over they rule that any idea of rejection and death and failure is an end of redemption. They knew that the Messiah ought to be glorious they knew that he ought to rule and they probably meant that that means at least evicting the Romans but watching Jesus be rejected and watching him being tortured and watching him dying forms no part of their understanding of the Christ.

Verse 25 Jesus said to them O foolish men slow of heart to believe all the prophets had spoken was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory to which Cleopas and his friend would say no that's not the way redemption ought to work we need someone to come along and fix these things not to die themselves we need someone to get rid of the suffering see what's so impossible for them to get their hearts around is not that Christ should enter his glory but that he should suffer these things to enter into his glory the very things that have brought redemption are the things they think are impossible for redemption to happen now it's important for us to say to each other this morning that we suffer from exactly the same heart disease slowness of heart to believe there is something inside each of us which is fundamentally hostile to the reversal of salvation that God works because we actually like the way we set the world up we don't mind salvation and redemption so long as it doesn't involve repentance and reversal and suffering and we especially don't want the cross because of what it says about us because the suffering of Jesus and the cross of Jesus say I cannot save myself there's nothing

I can do to justify myself and all those things that I'm frantically living for cannot bring redemption but that true redemption is about the forgiveness of my sins and you want to know what the end of my sins are it looks like that it looks like a man dying in agony on a cross what we want is a salvation that will give me the best possible life now on the west coast I just want a happy life I want to create perfect children who will fulfill all my dreams and even after we start following Jesus we want to take the cross out of Christianity we want to follow Jesus without a cross we want to have a salvation and a Christian life without suffering comes as a great shock to us when we stand up for the gospel that we should suffer just a little we begin to feel sorry for ourselves and we want to join Cleopas and his friend and walk away from Jerusalem not back toward Jerusalem we have an agenda for Jesus just as

[19:19] Cleopas did Cleopas wanted redemption from the Romans do you know what if Jesus had given them that that would have been a useless redemption for us the cross of Jesus shows once and for all that God's agenda is not our agenda that God's agenda is to liberate us from sin and from Satan and from death and the only way for that is for the son of God to die in bloody agony on the cross and to be raised from the dead it is the death on the cross of Jesus in Jerusalem it is the resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem that shows that salvation isn't just a vague spiritual feeling a kind of a universal philosophy of moral love the Christian gospel brothers and sisters is about what one man did in Jerusalem the one man who was mighty before God and mighty before man who set his face to go to Jerusalem who was rejected in

Jerusalem who died in Jerusalem who was raised to life in Jerusalem but what is most surprising I think about this section is how Jesus deals with their slowness of heart don't you expect Jesus to say to these guys in the middle of this conversation at verse 27 look it's me it's me but he doesn't verse 27 beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself what a walk that must have been seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus I don't want to press this but I think probably the Greek means that Jesus went through every single book of the Old Testament and showed them the great shape of salvation showing that all the scriptures are written about him so that if you want to understand

Jesus you have to go to the word written about him the cross of Jesus will always remain foolishness you will never have part of the resurrection until you believe the scriptures scriptures and specifically the Old Testament scriptures here is Jesus risen from the dead what does the newly risen Jesus do what does the resurrected Jesus do he teaches redemption through the word of God and I don't know where exactly he went in the scriptures I don't know exactly what he said

he might have gone to Genesis and talked about how the Messiah was the seed of woman who had come to crush Satan's head but his heel would be bruised in the process perhaps he went to Exodus and talked about being the Passover lamb and how the great redemption of Exodus was a rehearsal for the even greater Exodus through the death and resurrection he might have said he the Messiah was the substance of every

Old Testament sacrifice or that he was the suffering servant on whom God laid the sin of us all I'm not sure where he went but what it does mean is this that the whole message of the whole Bible again is not some universal message of brotherhood and niceness the Bible is not saying make nice to each other and make the world a better place the Bible is saying we're lost we're sick and we are enslaved and the body of Christ had to be broken on the cross and the blood of Christ had to be poured out on the cross and he had to rise again so that we would be healed and found and forgiven when they arrive at Emmaus they urge this pilgrim to join them and he does verse 30 he's at table with them he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them and their eyes were opened they recognised him he vanished out of their sight and they said to each other did not our hearts burn within us when he talked with us on the road while he opened the scriptures same word and they rose that hour returned to

Jerusalem they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them and they said the Lord is risen indeed he's appeared to Simon and so they said what had happened on the road and how he had made was made known to them in the breaking of the bread this is this is very beautiful and I'm going to finish with this it is a meal where Jesus finally reveals who he is to them this is the favourite place in Luke's gospel of Jesus revealing himself because the meal the banquet the feast is the picture of what redemption is for it was at a meal where Jesus revealed that he was the doctor the divine doctor come to heal us it was at a meal where Jesus revealed he had come to seek and to save the lost it's at a meal he reveals that those who are forgiven much will love much and although it was Cleopas house Jesus takes over as host and he takes the bread blesses and breaks it and there's something familiar in the way that Jesus breaks the bread and they go it's him and then he vanishes there are some commentators that want to make this into another version of the

[24 : 58] Lord's Supper it's not possible to do that it's different in the original text but there is one other meal in Luke's gospel that is exactly the same in the original and that is the great feast that Jesus brought on the mountain where he fed the five thousand and do you remember in that great feast it's the picture of the fact that Jesus is the host of the heavenly banquet and that when we trust in him and follow him that is where we're heading feast of finest foods and best wines and most succulent dishes the feast where every tear will be wiped away where we'll sit with Christ face to face and with one another death itself being vanished and here now in the last chapter of Luke's gospel the connection between us now and the feast then is the risen and living Jesus Christ soon as he vanishes they turn to each other and they say weren't our hearts burning within us when he opened the scriptures our eyes were opened as he opened the scriptures our hearts burned the same God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush now sets their hearts on fire as the risen Jesus teaches them the scriptures and comes to them through the scriptures and brothers and sisters that is why we are here that is why week by week we open the Bible as the word of God and we teach it because none of us can set our own hearts on fire I can't set your heart on fire nobody can do that for us it is only the risen and living one as he speaks to us through his word who can set our hearts on fire that's why I say if you don't believe the resurrection it is because you don't believe the scriptures if you believe the scriptures you will believe the resurrection and all of us ought to ask the Lord Jesus to speak to us and to set our hearts on fire week by week and now they go back to

Jerusalem they had walked away from Jerusalem with their hearts cold and their hearts slow believing that Jesus was amongst the dead ones redemption was lost and now they run back to Jerusalem with their hearts on fire knowing that God's purposes of redemption from the start of scripture have been achieved through the death and resurrection of Jesus and they want everyone they want everyone to know and that's where we'll pick it up next week let's kneel for prayer pray with me pray with me in your heart the Lord is my chosen portion and my cup you hold my lot the lines have fallen for me in pleasant places indeed I have a beautiful inheritance Lord you are the audience of our worship and prayers be near us as we seek your presence accept our prayers we pray let there be a moment of silence as we gather our thoughts before the Lord dear father we thank you for the sacrifice we thank you for the risen Christ as the scriptures were opened us to to

us this morning by

David and by many others over the past months we can say we have seen Jesus thank you for the opening of the eyes of our heart to understand your word hide it deep within our hearts that we may not sin against it set our hearts on fire Lord as your word was preached this morning and you made us see the Lord while it was hidden from the disciples we are without excuse Lord we have a tendency to say Lord don't you know what's going on in this world yet in our spirit we see and rejoice with your people that Christ is risen indeed and that we have tasted his goodness and love and that we may have confidence we have a redeemer Jesus God's own son who has entered into glory you have indeed begun the great faith in us thank you for the cross maybe to marvel that death could not hold him maybe declared a son of God to a world full of darkness we can say with certainty that the veil was lifted and now we pray that the veil that lies over many nations still will also be lifted that many in this world will say behold this is the Lord our God we have waited for him that he might save us this is the Lord we have waited for him let us be glad and rejoice in him Lord in your mercy may the dominion of your kingdom find a solitary place in our hearts forsaking all others as we walk towards the new

Jerusalem and father as we walk together help us to pray with confidence your kingdom come the mighty reversal has indeed come help us also to take up our cross we pray for our church as we struggle to be free to worship you in spirit and in truth we pray father for the judge who must weigh truth and falsehood may God our righteous judge direct him in all truth and may he see Jesus may your will be done and may we feast with you no matter what happens Lord in your mercy as we live in a world what truth is lost may our children and grandchildren be kept from temptations to follow the lie engraved among the palm of your hand we pray we plead father for those who do violence in our streets that they may turn and be healed rather than be destroyed we pray for all those who give us leadership we pray father for our leaders for Gordon Campbell and Stephen

Harper we pray for all world leaders in these tumultuous times deliver us from self and create in us the clean heart of God for such is the preaching of your word that we would turn from all that hinders our walk Lord in your mercy we pray for all those who bring your word in foreign lands for Sharon as she faithfully translates your word for Brian as he rescues the little ones in Cambodia we pray for Doug and Anna we pray dear father that both our hearts and our heads are lifted up to you all the days of our life strengthen our weary hands as we lift them up to you reminding you again father that you are so big and that we are so small Lord in your mercy Lord Jesus may we haste the day of your coming when the earth will birth their dead and the death will be swallowed up in victory as we pray for our sick and shut-ins we silently remember those close to us may the Lord answer us in the day of trouble we pray father for Ben and

[33 : 11] Nancy strengthen and encourage their heart as they trust in you we pray for her we know that her courage which strengthened us will continue we pray for Harold Don Stephen George Ron and Gordon and remember dear father those who are frail may these be times of reflection and wholeness Lord in your mercy we pray for our soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan for their families who have suffered lost in these last weeks and for those soldiers who have come back with wounded souls we pray for those who make decisions about war and peace so righteous as dear father in the Middle East a knowledge about our Lord Jesus Christ so that the eyes of the blind will be open and the dear ears of the deaf unstopped and not in the least we pray for this beautiful place we call Canada revive us our Lord and father as we see fires and we see things happening Lord that are really difficult to see when such beauty burns up Lord be with the people in Kelowna we pray Lord in your mercy pray confidently with me I bless the Lord who gives me counsel in the night also my heart instructs me I have said the Lord always before me because he is at my right hand I shall not be shaken therefore my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices my flesh also dwells secure amen when she says the Lord Jesus Jesus Christ now practicing God what we meet for my temper so they ease the nature of our lives the Cape DC