

Easter Morning 2021

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Preacher: Canon David Short

- [0 : 0 0] Well, each one of those verses of the anthem finishes with a threefold alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, which is the happiest and most joyful way of saying praise God.
- And with all the bad and sad news around us this Easter, we could do with some good news. And in one sense, whenever we come to hear the word of God together, we are hearing good news.
- But today is the most joy-giving, life-changing, hallelujah-making great good news of Easter, that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.
- And death and all its friends like COVID, they're defeated. That Christ is exactly who he said he was, the Son of God, alive today.
- That his death has been completely effective. That forgiveness and eternal life are real and offered to us afresh today. That the great renewal and redemption God has promised has begun.
- [1 : 0 9] That we have a living hope of being raised from the dead with him. That he is coming to judge the living and the dead and make all things new. We could go on and on. And you might think that this last chapter of Luke that was read to us by Sam and Bailey might have more dancing and vuvuzelas, you know, those trumpets that make one note.
- That's not what we find. The chapter is about the risen Jesus taking disciples who are doubting and dispirited and dejected and changing them, transporting them from despair into confident hope and joy and faith by a miracle that's nothing less than a new heart.
- In fact, it's a chapter about the greatest possible change in the world through the resurrection of Jesus, which becomes real in our lives today. There are three stories in the chapter.
- And in every single one of those stories, we begin with disciples who are depressed and discouraged. So in the first episode, which we didn't read, the women go to the empty tomb, not expecting to find Jesus risen.
- There's no dancing and cheering. They're just overwhelmed with anxiety and distress. The middle story, which we did read, have two people walking away from Jerusalem off to Emmaus.
- [2 : 3 7] Jesus comes to walk beside them. And there are no fist bumps and hugs of delirium, but inconsolable, dismal bewilderment. And in the third story that we didn't read, the 11 apostles are in the upper room.
- And when the risen Jesus appears, they don't welcome him with gladness. They're terrified. They're frightened. They think he's a ghost. And something happens in each of these three stories, which changes everything.
- So that by the end of the story, by the end of each episode, there's joy and worship and hope. The women race back to Jerusalem after seeing the angels with good news.
- The two on the road, they also race back to Jerusalem saying they'd met the risen Jesus. And the 11 worship Jesus with overwhelming joy. And Luke, who wrote this gospel, had access to all the eyewitnesses.

But he's very carefully chosen these three stories because he wants to focus on the change that took place, simply because that's the change that can happen for us today.

[3 : 49] And the remarkable thing about this resurrection day, the first resurrection day, is that the bodily appearances of the risen Jesus do not automatically create faith in those who are his disciples.

That's right. They had some sort of devotion toward Jesus. They'd been very brave and they'd stuck it out until he had been killed in this gruesome death.

But now they're in a spiritual lockdown. Even though Jesus had told them repeatedly that he was going to Jerusalem, where he'd be crucified on the cross and three days later rise again, they didn't really believe him.

So when he appears risen from the dead, they just can't believe it. And it tells us something very important, you see, that the Christian gospel, the Christian good news, is not just a general God's universal love floating around, nor is it something that we can work up with ourselves by really trying hard.

The Christian gospel is very specifically tied to this one man, Jesus Christ, to his life and to his death and to his resurrection.

[5 : 04] That at the centre of all God's plans, this change that happens, doesn't happen by positive feelings, but by faith in this man in his death and resurrection.

And even though the evidence and demonstration of Jesus' risen body was not enough to compel faith and change their hearts. Please don't understand.

The chapter is chock full of evidence of Jesus' resurrection. Look at it sometime. In the last story, he appears to the 11 who knew him the best. And he says, look, see my hands and my feet, touch and see.

A ghost doesn't have flesh and bones as I do. And Luke tells us they disbelieved for joy. Then he said, look, I love that. Can I smell barbecued fish around here somewhere?

Give me some and I'll have some. So he took it and ate it. You might think that would be enough, but it wasn't. There was one more thing Jesus had to do. He doesn't say, guys, it's me, it's me, it's me, and jump up and down and say, here are 10 miracles and I can explain how the resurrection works.

[6 : 15] And what he does is he teaches them the scriptures. He opens their mind to understand the word of God. Because it's not just the plain facts of Jesus' bodily resurrection that brings a change of heart.

It gives us the spiritual sight of Jesus, confident and hopeful faith. It's the work of God that happens in us by the word of God.

And that's why Dr. Luke gives us this central episode in chapter 24, verses 13 to 35. Because it shows most clearly how the risen Jesus makes this change in his first followers and how he can do it today.

It's a very beautiful story. Let me just run through it quickly. On verse 13, we're reminded it starts on the same day as the resurrection, the same day the women went to the empty tomb and met the angels.

And we meet these two depressed disciples, gloomy and glum. And they're walking on the road to a village that is about 10 kilometres away from Jerusalem, Emmaus.

[7 : 20] It's near the close of the day. Luke has chosen the story very carefully because these are two people we've never heard of before. We never hear of again. They're not central to everything.

We only know the name of one of them because it just slips out in verse 18. And I think Luke chooses them because they're not central to the gospel story, just like us.

And they're dragging their feet. They've basically given up any hope on Jesus. And they're talking. And the word means they're bickering like children. They're bewildered and they don't understand what's going on.

And Jesus draws near to them and begins walking beside them. And in one of the moments, just a lovely moment, it's like a hallelujah irony. They're so disappointed and disoriented.

They hardly notice him and they don't recognise him. And in verse 16, we read, Their eyes were kept from recognising him, which means there's something supernatural going on.

[8 : 21] And that they're so overwhelmed by their emotions, they're disconnected from the risen Jesus. And so Jesus says, What are you talking about? And in verse 17, they stop and look sad, just gloomy.

And they say, You must be the only one in Jerusalem who doesn't know what's going on. Another hallelujah irony, because he's the one at the heart of things. So they tell Jesus, the risen Jesus, the story of Jesus of Nazareth.

And the key thing in their mind is the power. He was mighty indeed in word. You should have seen his miracles. But it ended very badly for him. He was executed in a grisly way by our clergy.

And his death means that he can't be the Messiah. We were beginning to hope that he might bring redemption, liberation. And this morning, a couple of our women went to the tomb and began a rumor about angels.

But this whole resurrection thing, it's just too hard to believe. And we're going home. We've had enough. We're going to go back to our real lives. Jesus is just a big disappointment. And Jesus says, verse 25, And beginning with Moses and the first five books of the Bible, he explained and interpreted to them how all the scriptures were about him.

[9 : 49] And as they get close to their home, he acts as though he's going to go further because he never enters our lives unless he's invited. And they invite him to come in and stay over.

And at the meal, Jesus takes the bread and breaks it. And suddenly their eyes are open and they recognize him in this very familiar action. And no sooner do they recognize him than he disappears. And they're so excited.

They say to each other, didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us? All doubt is gone. The room in their hearts are flooded with hope and faith.

They're convinced Jesus has risen from the dead. So they race the 10 kilometers back to Jerusalem to tell the 11 in the upper room. And the questions for us are this. Where does this new hope come from?

How did the change actually happen? Why don't they recognize Jesus when he comes up beside them? And could this change happen for me today?

[10 : 52] And that's why Luke has it here. He wants to show us it has to do, this change has to do with our hearts and our spiritual sight.

That's how he frames the change. It's a movement from slow and sluggish hearts to having hearts that are set on fire. From frozen, foggy hearts to fiery hearts.

From stony hearts to living hearts. So let me look at those two things. Firstly, the slow and stony hearts. There's no evidence in this gospel or any of the other gospels that Jesus' risen body looked any different from the body he had when he was alive.

He expected them to recognize him after his recognition. And their lack of recognition was not because he looked different, but because their hearts were slow and sluggish.

Sluggish. And this word sluggish means deliberately slowing down, not moving with the truth. I'm deliberately delaying and putting off what I know to be right.

[12 : 04] Very humbling to be told by Jesus that our hearts are slow and dull. And in the Bible, the heart is not the seat of the emotions.

It's the control center of our lives. It's how you choose what you're going to trust in, what you're going to commit to. It affects our minds and our will and our affections, what we believe as well as our emotions.

And in the Bible, our spiritual sight comes out of our hearts. So the problem for these two followers, the problem for all the disciples in Luke 24, is not outside them in Jesus, but inside them.

It's an attitude of heart. And the slowness of heart leads to a spiritual blindness. And that's what stops them and stops us from seeing who Jesus is.

Right after Jesus comes to walk beside them, we read in verse 16, their eyes were kept from recognizing him. There's something holding, keeping their eyes from seeing.

[13 : 08] And from one point of view, this is God at work, stopping them from seeing who Jesus is. Which is why, of course, it takes a complete miracle to see who Jesus really is.

By ourselves, we cannot see spiritual reality. You know, earlier in Luke, this is exactly what Jesus himself taught. He prays this. He says, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you've hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, that's your gracious will. You can have the highest IQ in your neighborhood, but be completely unable to grasp the most basic and simple spiritual truths until God reveals them to you.

This is his gracious will. This is what he wants to do. It's absolutely right that God controls access to himself. We're not equals. You can't force God to show himself on your terms.

And Jesus is thankful for the way that God does reveal because he shows himself to little children, to those who are humble, who are willing to listen and to learn, who say, I don't deserve this.

[14 : 19] Please show yourself to me. That is his gracious will. But their lack of being able to see also has a human point of view as well. The reason Cleopas and his friend cannot see Jesus is that there's a sticking point and it's the cross.

They love the powerful deeds of Jesus, but they don't want a Jesus who ends up in a gruesome execution. They don't have a place for suffering. That's the point of verse 21 where they say, we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel.

They had a very contemporary view of liberation, actually. Israel was occupied by the Romans and Cleopas and many others saw themselves as part of an oppressed group.

Their identity was made up as being part of an oppressed group with the Romans as the oppressors. And they saw redemption as a political redemption from oppression. And the crucifixion comes along and shatters those hopes because it exposes every self-focused attempt at power.

You see, they say to themselves, if Jesus had really been the Messiah and had the favour of God, he would have been successful in liberating us, but he died on the cross, abandoned by everyone, including God.

[15 : 37] They had had the best teacher the world has ever seen, and yet the hearts were still stony and slow to see who Jesus really was. And they held to this tiny human-centred view of redemption, no room for a risen Messiah because there was no room for a suffering Messiah who died.

And what is it that makes the change in their hearts? How does God open their eyes? This is why Luke is writing, to show us that this can happen for us today. So I move secondary from slow and stony hearts to warm and fiery hearts.

I was going to say fierce and ferocious, but I think warm and fiery is better. So what does Jesus do? He doesn't dance up and down, say, it's me and me, it's me, it's me, look, here I am.

What he does is he opens their eyes by opening the scriptures to them. And their hearts move from being stony and cold and slow to being set on fire as Jesus teaches them everything about himself in the Old Testament.

In this chapter, the angels pointed the women to the words of the Son of God. And now Jesus, in this episode and in the next episode, he takes the disciples back to the Old Testament to open their eyes to see who he is.

[17 : 08] In other words, there are two miracles on the day of resurrection. One is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead himself. The other is the risen Jesus teaching God's word and revealing himself through his word.

He doesn't just appear to them. He appears and teaches them. Because faith in Jesus is not just faith in a one-off event, but it's belief in the whole witness and work of God over thousands of years.

And we can't really understand the work of God or the Son of God apart from the word of God. And what makes fire in their hearts is as Jesus takes all their hopes and confusions and disappointments and brings them to the word of God and shows them who he is in the word of God, he reveals himself and their hearts begin to burn.

We've had an astonishing preview of this earlier on in Luke's gospel in chapter 16. Now Jesus there told a story about a rich man and Lazarus.

And in the story, the rich man is in hell and he's speaking to Abraham in heaven. And he says to Abraham, look, just send someone to rise from the dead back to my brothers to warn them.

[18 : 27] That'll work. And Abraham says this, See, because true faith is not just faith in a miracle or faith in general.

It's not just faith in the idea of a resurrection. It's faith in this Jesus who was raised from the dead and who died. And this faith comes from Jesus as he opens our minds to understand the scriptures.

You see, how does the risen Jesus speak to his people today? Exactly the same way as he spoke to these two on the road. By opening our eyes to who he is, by opening the scriptures to us.

He, the risen Jesus, teaches us what the Bible says about him. And in verse 25, Jesus rebukes Cleopas for this, not believing the prophets in the Old Testament.

And he says, Was it not necessary, was it not the will of God, that the Messiah should suffer these things and then into his glory?

[19 : 42] And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the thing concerning himself. What an amazing couple of hours. I would have loved to have been there. Jesus starts with Moses in the first five books of the Bible.

Does he show the two that Moses was rejected and that's how God made him a mediator with Israel? Does he go over the redemption, the great exodus from slavery in Egypt, showing them again that the redemption is bigger than a political redemption and the defeat of Pharaoh, how God took victory over the gods of Egypt and saved them by the blood of the Passover lamb?

Does he go to the book of Leviticus and show them that he is the fulfillment of the sacrificial system? Does he go to the book of Deuteronomy and show how Christ must become a curse for us by hanging on a tree?

Does he go to King David, hunted and haunted by King Saul, who comes into his kingdom by suffering? Does he go to the book of Isaiah and talk about the suffering servants smitten by God, bearing our griefs, pierced for our transgressions?

I don't know. But just as the resurrected Jesus did on that day, he continues to open our hearts by opening the word to us.

[21 : 01] We come to see who Jesus is. We come to have our eyes open and our hearts set on fire and as our faith is directed to the real Jesus as we hear Jesus himself speaking to us through his word.

Has this happened to you? Is it happening to you? And it explains so much about Christianity. Because the facts about Christianity, the evidence for the resurrection, is part of the public record.

And if you'd like to know more about the facts and if you would like to hear and look at the scriptures, you can join us any Monday night for Gospel Mondays. Or in two weeks' time, we're going to have a newcomers group via Zoom.

Or you can contact me at church. I'd be happy to meet with you online or send you something. But this is why we sing hallelujah. This is why we sing praise to God today.

It's because of Jesus. Christian faith is not about morality where we're trying to earn the love of God. It's having our eyes open to the majesty of this one man, this son of God, who died in my place, taking my sins, who rose from the dead, opening the kingdom of heaven, who redeems us from sin and from death and from judgment, who creates new hearts that burn within us, where we daily grow to know Jesus more and more, until we too, one day, are raised from the dead, never to die again.

[22 : 38] again. And so we sing hallelujah. Hallelujah. Thank you.

That's not true. So you can well... God, what if you can witness this? That's not true. We say something that makes you understand this.

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