

Beginning Now, It's You
Luke 24:36-49 and Psalm 4
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Imagine you're the parent of two **young** children... and something **big** has happened in their life, something life-changing... an event, you know, they'll have trouble understanding, wrapping their minds around. Maybe grandma's become terribly ill... or you're being transferred to Phoenix and the family's got to move... leaving friends and the schools and church you love. You **know** this is going to be **hard** for them. So, gently, patiently and as reassuringly as you can, you let them know what's going on. And you do the best you **can** to help them understand it... to take it into themselves, to begin to come to terms with it, and what it means, and how they'll cope. You do the best you **can** for those children you love. And maybe you **also** think, *I sure wish Mr. Rogers was here to help with this.*

I have a sense that something **like** this was going on in **Jerusalem** when Jesus, newly risen, came and stood among his disciples. *Peace be with you*, is what he **said** to them. But it is clear that they were anything **but** peaceful at that point. They were **startled** and terrified! They **thought** they were seeing a ghost! So, calmly, gently and patiently Christ went to work... reassuring the disciples, showing them it was he himself, their Master, the one they knew. *Look at my hands and feet. Touch me and see. I myself am with you here.* They **handed** him a leftover from the meal they'd finished... and he ate it... just the same as they had. It **was** their Lord. It **WAS** him! Then, sensing their **readiness**, Jesus took them a step further. He opened their minds. He cleared their confusion. He helped them **understand** the scriptures... to understand that **all** that was written there about the **Messiah** was, in **truth**, about **him**. **He'd** been the one who was to suffer and die... **and rise from** death to **live** again... as, clearly, he had... since, clearly, he was there and alive with them. Of course, it was their **Lord!**

And then, Christ led them one step **further**. Now **remember**, he said, *that the scriptures have to be fulfilled. And the scriptures say that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in the Messiah's name to all peoples, starting from here, from Jerusalem. A complete change-of-life through the forgiveness of sins is going to be proclaimed in my name to all peoples, starting from here... from Jerusalem. Do you understand this?*

Well, yes, Lord. Except, when the scriptures say that someone's going to be proclaiming these things in your name, who do they mean? What are they talking about?

*Well, the scriptures mean **you!** You, now... and later on, others. But, here and now, it's **you** that they mean. And who better than **you** to **carry** the message?! You have witnessed everything! You've seen how I've worked. You've learned alongside of me. You've experienced my forgiveness personally... and you've given yourselves to me deeply. You are my friends. You've shared in my ministry. You know what I've been doing. You've seen the life with God I have opened to everyone... and what it **means** to enter **into** that life in faith. You know that I intend for everyone to enjoy abundant life – everyone – rich and poor, sinner, saint, those close by and those in other places, too – everyone. You are witnesses of all of this. And **now**, it's almost time for you to begin your special, sacred work. It is almost time.*

*There's just **one** thing you need before you begin. To move into this ministry, to undertake it in the way that you must, you will need, God knows, the help of the Holy Spirit. You cannot do it without*

*the Spirit's help - it would be a **mistake** for you even to **try**. So, for now, wait here. Stay here together in Jerusalem until I send what God has promised you. When you're equipped with **power from on high**, then you will be ready to **begin**.*

It was quite a conversation that the disciples had in Jerusalem with Christ that day.

Now, I want to ask you to reflect just a bit on the **commission** those disciples received from their Lord. It's a task that **they** were given... **and** one that has fallen to every further generation of Christ's followers... including ours. Christ's **disciples**, the scriptures promised, would be **proclaiming** repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

First – *Proclaiming*. **Preaching** is a word we often hear. *Preach the gospel at all times*, St Francis is reputed to have said. *When necessary, use words*. Preach, proclaim, demonstrate, enact, exhibit, embody, en flesh the gospel. Let it not only be **heard** but also **seen** in the **way** you live, and for **whom** you expend your energies.

Second – note that the disciples would undertake their mission in **Christ's** name. In his... and no one else's. On his behalf. At his behest. For his purposes. In the manner he proscribes. With his authority. By his virtues. And through his mercies. His, only his – not their own... nor anyone else's.

Third – they would demonstrate repentance... literally a life turned **around** and pointed in the opposite direction... the total life-**change** that results when God's forgiveness brings down the barriers people continually throw up between themselves and God. So **promised** the **scriptures**. The disciples would invite **others** to join them in fully re-orienting their lives **toward** God... and **away** from everything **but** God. They'd urge people to cease living for themselves and to instead employ their energies for God... to find **freedom** in their dependence upon God... and **wholeness** as they pour themselves out in the name of Christ. They would themselves **show** others **how**! That is what the scriptures said they'd be doing, Christ told them – **exhibiting** their **completely**-changed, God-focused, God-directed lives.

And the disciples – with inspired good sense – **said**, *OK, Lord... we'll give it a go... as soon as the Spirit comes and has its way with us. We're going to hang out here and hold off on this job until we've gotten the help you've promised us... until we've been equipped with Holy Power.*

And they did hold off and hang out there... until the Spirit was bestowed.

But – spoiler alert! – when, as promised, God **sent** the Spirit and they were indeed clothed with **power**, those disciples truly showed God's stuff. Not **their** stuff, but God's! They went to work... or, rather, God went to work through them. And as those God-forgiven, Christ-directed, Spirit empowered disciples answered their calling, **followed** in their Savior's ways, **expressed** their devotion, poured **out** their gifts and **offered** their powerful, authentic witness, the **people** in **Jerusalem** began to take notice. Persons visiting Jerusalem from any number of nations started to see and understand that something extraordinary was going on... that something holy and gracious, life-altering and life-giving had happened when Christ gave his life for the sins of the world and in three days was raised from death to reign as Lord of life and love. The kingdom of **heaven**, those **disciples** could see, was showing up in **Jerusalem**. In plain sight. Where they worshipped God. Where they broke bread together. Where the sick were being healed. Where forgiveness was being offered and received... and spiritual community developed. And... Christ

was found to be there **with** them, there... just as he'd **promised** he would be... as it began there in Jerusalem.

And then, as **one** generation of witnesses after **another** received **its** commission and the power to pursue it, the presentation of the gospel promised in the scriptures bore fruit... and led to our being here today... gathered in worship as Bon Air Presbyterians... gathered apart and yet together as inhabitants of this extraordinary country, this nation of nations and peoples from throughout the world.

What if today Christ appeared in this room... or in your room... came, while we were talking about this and, standing among us, said, *Peace be with you!* Would **we** be startled and terrified? Perhaps! Would Jesus slowly, gently, patiently try to help us... to reassure us, to show us that it really is he himself who is with us. Would Christ try to help **us** take it in, to understand, to accept that he has come to be with us. And, once he'd gotten us comfortable with that, might he not then say, *Now you **also** are witnesses of what I've done and what I'm doing to extend God's forgiveness and to open the way for people to turn to God and through God's mercies live completely new lives. **You are also** my witnesses, those of whom the scripture's speak... those commissioned to proclaim forgiveness now. You're disciples who'll demonstrate to your neighbors the life-change that comes through God's forgiveness. Beginning **NOW**, it's you!* (It's really us!)

So, are you ready? Are you set? Are you prepared to go... to answer Christ's call? Are you prepared to live for him now, to be **focused** on his desires and **dependent** on his resources? Are you determined to follow his **direction**, wherever it leads you?

No, I think – you're probably not. And neither am I... **not** if we haven't been clothed with power from on high. I believe that power has been **promised** to us. But I'm not sure that we've been all that willing to wait for God to bestow it. I have this sense – I know I could be wrong – but I have this sense that **waiting** on God is **hard** for us. It's really challenging. And, therefore, it's something we're inclined to skip by. And, anxious to do good, we push into well-intentioned activity and benevolent projects mainly on the steam that we summon from within ourselves... rather than the power promised from on high. We might, by such steam, be able to keep a congregation going. We might run a magnificent music ministry... have enriching studies... provide meaningful worship... redevelop programs for our children and youth... give significant amounts of money to worthy causes... and do a whiz-bang job caring for one another. But if the task Christ has set for us is that of proclaiming and exhibiting to the peoples around us a complete life-change through the forgiveness of sins... if we are going to seriously take on **that** task, we're going to need power from on high. We're going to **need** some Holy Help.

Friends, wait for it. Help has been promised. And when God gives it, you will know it. And the nations and peoples around us will, too. They will come to **know** the **joy** of the gospel, the grace of Christian community. And, having played **our** part in that, so will we.

May it be so. In Christ's name. Amen.