



Luke 24:36-49 - <sup>36</sup> While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>37</sup> They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. <sup>38</sup> He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? <sup>39</sup> 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." <sup>40</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. <sup>41</sup> And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate it in their presence. <sup>44</sup> 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." <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> 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."

## *Christ's Word of Promise Brings Easter's Blessings*



*The LORD's right hand is lifted high; the LORD's right hand has done mighty things! I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done.*

*(Psalm 118:16-17)*

*Repetitio mater studiorum est.* Everybody still with me? Most textbooks you read about preaching would probably tell you *not* to start your sermon by saying something in Latin, but let's have a little fun. Have you ever heard that little, Latin phrase? *Repetitio mater studiorum est.* It's fairly common, especially in academic circles – well, at least in the circles I've been in – but it means “Repetition is the mother of learning.” Do something over and over and over again, and more than likely, eventually you'll have it nailed. Say what you want about educational theory and the potential weakness of a pedagogy that is driven by rote repetition and memorization, but it can work. Repetition is the mother of learning. My teachers in school would use that mantra to make us drill over and over again noun declensions and verb conjugations in tucked away basement classrooms where dead languages went to die all over again....and it actually helped! Has it ever happened to you that you can't for the life of you remember what your password is to get into your Amazon account, that is, until you sit down at the keyboard and start typing, almost unconsciously? And suddenly, somewhere from the deep recesses of your gray matter, emerges your Amazon password! Hundreds and even thousands of hours of repetition can have some beautiful results: the hands of a craftsman move almost on their own; the brush of an artist glides effortlessly with learned motion; the smooth swing of a pro golfer makes me believe that I could actually play that sport! Repetition is the mother of learning – whether it's a skill of a set of facts – going over something again and again can have a powerful effect.

Repetition is the mother of learning, but sometimes the information doesn't seem to stick. Or maybe, it becomes so repetitive that the facts get emptied of their meaning and import. One place where that's especially dangerous is right here. How many times have you heard the gospel? How many times have you, yourself rehearsed all the historical, factual events of Holy Week and Easter? We know the details of the story – the who, the what, the where, and the when – but what often gets left out of our cognitive retelling of the Easter story is the most important question of all – Why? Why did Jesus do this? What does it all mean? What did it mean when Jesus died on a cross 2,000 years ago some 6,600 miles away? What does it mean for me, today in 2018, that I have a living Savior? It happens so easily - I forget what it means that Jesus is alive. Too many are the days when it seems like my sin is my problem and mine alone. Countless are the thoughts about what the future holds for the little flock of Christ's church. Worry, anxiety, and stress slap me in the face right when I get up in the morning, and I think there really is no hope. You and I need to hear again what it means that Jesus is alive.

The eleven disciples certainly needed to have someone put the pieces together for them. How many times through the course of his ministry did Jesus say something like, “*The Son of Man must suffer, die, and on the third day rise again?*” A lot! This was the whole point, and Jesus taught it over and over and over to his disciples – but it didn't seem to stick...even after they saw it with their own eyes! So, there they were, on Easter Sunday night. **While they were still talking about this, Jesus stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”** You could read and read all the historical facts about Easter from the gospels, but you'd never grasp the “why” or “what does it all mean” apart from the gift of faith given to you by the Holy Spirit. The disciples had heard the facts, they'd seen the empty tomb, but what did it all mean? Repetition might be the mother of learning, but it's not the father of faith. That's a gift only God can give. **Then [Jesus] opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.** Now, it all came together! Now they could see that everything Jesus promised and everything Jesus did, he promised and did just for me! From the very beginning of the Old Testament, all the way through the prophets, and the Psalms – there he is! Jesus – like a golden thread weaving its way through the whole tapestry of Scripture. What is Scripture all about? Jesus Christ – the Savior of the world. Jesus Christ – the Savior of you!



Many have endeavored to understand this book called the Bible, and unfortunately many have tried to do that by removing Christ from the Scriptures. But if you remove the Word made flesh from the Word, you're left with an entirely human book, even though you may know the facts. And so the whole narrative gets flipped on its head. The Scriptures aren't a checklist to advance you on your quest from vice to virtue. The Scriptures aren't the rungs of a ladder on which you climb to God. But my sinful nature wants it to be. That way, I can compare myself to my neighbor and show everyone just how much more committed I am than he is. Then I can, at least in my own mind, lessen my need for forgiveness because, well frankly, I don't have all that much to forgive – at least not as much as she does! But when we do that, it isn't Jesus we're seeing in the Scriptures; it's ourselves. The Scriptures, at least according to Jesus, are the testimony about him! Everything he wants us to know and believe – who he is, what he's done, what that means for our salvation – right there in the Scriptures. **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.**

Notice where Jesus points his frightened followers for proof. Sure, he shows them his hands and side, and yes, he eats some fish to show that he's not a ghost. But where does he really want to point them for proof? Straight to the Word! And even more, Jesus makes it crystal clear that Christ is on every page of Holy Writ. Here is the beating heart of the gospel that stands behind Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. **This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.** Remember all the times Jesus had laid out what the Scriptures said would happen, but the disciples didn't quite grasp it? "I will be crucified." *I wonder what he means by that.* "I will be put to death and be buried." *What do you suppose he's driving at?* "On the third day, I will rise to life." *Sorry, Jesus, but you've lost me!* But now, by a gift of God, Jesus pulls back the veil and patiently shows his disciples once again what he's been saying the whole time: **These are the Scriptures that testify about me.** What grace he shows – reminding the disciples what it means that Jesus is alive.

Do you need to relearn and be reminded of what it means that Jesus is alive? I know I do - every single day! Does the devil want to make you think that your sin is your problem and yours alone? That you're too far gone, especially if everyone knew what kind of person you really are? Jesus is alive, and since Jesus is alive, you can take that lying devil to the empty cross and the empty tomb and show him that here the price was paid. Does your worry about the future consume you so much that you almost feel paralyzed by it in the present? Jesus is alive, and since he's alive, he will make good on his promise to work all things for your good. Do your stress and anxiety make you feel like hope is just an impossibility? Jesus is alive, and since he's alive, hope isn't an abstract concept – in fact - hope is a person, once dead and alive again...for you!

What a message for the whole world to hear! All of this good news, Jesus wraps up in a seemingly strange vessel: Words. But this is the point. Jesus points his disciples and us to his Word. Jesus told his disciples, **Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in [Christ's] name to all nations.** So the Apostles went out. Preach they did! Pull punches they did not! Did you hear what Peter said in our first lesson today? **You killed the author of life!** You! Your sin, your wicked selfishness put Jesus on that cross! The message of God's law is unmistakable. But just as unmistakable is the message of the gospel. **You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead.** In that preaching, the apostles draw a straight line from the Jesus they saw, touched, and watched eat – they draw a straight line to the Jesus that is proclaimed into your ears today in the message of the gospel. We need to hear it, hear it again, and then hear it again.

In his grace, Jesus teaches, Jesus teaches, Jesus teaches. Three times in Luke 24, the reality of an empty tomb necessitates further explanation. First, to the women at the tomb, the angel messengers said, **"Remember how he told you...the Son of Man must be delivered...crucified...and raised.** Second, to those two disciples from Emmaus



whose hopes had been shattered, Jesus himself said, **“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”** And finally, to his own downcast disciples, **“Everything must be fulfilled...the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead.** Did you catch the common theme of all three of those teachable moments? Yes, in all three instances, the attention is directed not to the empty tomb itself and not even to Jesus himself right away. All three teachable moments hinge entirely on the Word and promise of God in Scripture. But there’s another similarity. Did you notice the “necessity” of it all? **The Son of Man MUST be crucified...The Christ HA[D] to suffer...Everything MUST be fulfilled.** Jesus teaches, Jesus teaches, Jesus teaches – it wasn’t optional for him to die and rise. It was necessary.

Think about that with me for a second. I don’t want to fall into the deep end of the philosophical pool, but follow me on this. It’s striking that Jesus says his suffering, death, and resurrection are *necessary*. What are the things that are *necessary* in your life? Air to breathe, food to eat, water to drink, shelter from the weather. But notice something about all those necessities of life – they’re all things that are foisted on you from the outside. You didn’t choose to need food and water to survive. That’s who we are as human beings. Those necessities were put on you and you had no choice in the matter; it’s just the way it is. OK, flip the coin. What’s necessary for Jesus? As true God he created everything. He needs nothing. As the Almighty God no one can put a necessity on him from the outside. So what a remarkable thing Jesus repeats over and over again. **It is necessary.** Jesus, completely free from any need, chooses to make one thing absolutely necessary for himself – you. The One who is encumbered by no necessity of his own is loaded with the guilt of your sin. The One who needs nothing and no one, chooses to take on our human flesh to live the life we couldn’t and die the death we should’ve. The One who is Almighty and completely free from any necessity makes one thing absolutely necessary for himself – saving you. This Jesus, who is Life itself, would rather die than hold your sins against you.

That’s the “why” of Easter; the answer to the grand question, “What does it all mean?” Jesus points you and me not to an empty tomb, not even to his nail scarred hands. He points us to his Word and promise – right where he wants us to find him. In the waters of baptism, you saw it today, another sinful creature connected to the power of Christ’s death and resurrection. It didn’t look like much – a few splashes of water and some words. But then, Jesus showed up. He didn’t walk in through the back door of church, but you’d better believe he is present in his Word of promise, just as he said. You heard it come from the mouth of this clay pot before you – *I forgive you all your sins.* Didn’t sound all that earth shattering – but then, Jesus showed up. He did rappel down from the ceiling, but you’d better believe Jesus is there, attached to his Word of promise, just like he told you. You’ll see it in a few minutes – a wafer, some wine, but look again through his Word of promise – the very body and blood that were given and shed for you. And Jesus doesn’t just do this once. He gives and he gives and he teaches and he teaches, so that by his grace we trust that his Word of promise brings all of Easter’s blessings, just for us. Christ is risen – he is risen indeed! Don’t forget what that means!

Amen

*To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.*

(Jude 24-25)