

## Luke 24:36-49

36 While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’<sup>37</sup> They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.<sup>38</sup> He said to them, ‘Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?’<sup>39</sup> Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’<sup>40</sup> And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.<sup>41</sup> While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’<sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish,<sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate in their presence.

44 Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,<sup>46</sup> and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,<sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’<sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.<sup>49</sup> And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’

### **He Lives As Our Healer**

This is the second week of our three-week mini-series, “He Lives.” The main thrust of this series is to emphasize that Jesus is alive and well and with us, according to his own words, “to the end of the age,” or more accurately, “eternally.” Last week I spoke of how Jesus lives as Savior of the world, and I challenged you to imagine a perfect world – a world without fear, without crime, without death – and to see that such a world is God’s plan for us and that Jesus’ resurrection assures us that such a world is coming. Obviously we’re not there yet; there’s plenty wrong with the world today. But God’s kingdom, a kingdom of eternal love and peace and justice and LIFE, will come on earth as it is in heaven. And that vision is our hope; it’s what encourages us when things in this world in this lifetime don’t go so well for us. And while such a perfect place as God’s kingdom cannot be established by our own efforts – it will certainly require God’s intervention in world history – we as disciples of Jesus Christ are commissioned with announcing that coming kingdom.

But our message is not going to be accepted or embraced unless we are credible witnesses of Jesus Christ, which means we need to be obedient, but in order to be obedient we must also be healed... or at least healing. One critique often levied against Methodists is that we emphasize discipleship and omit anything else. In Matthew’s gospel Jesus commissions his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations,” and Methodists have adopted this in our own mission statement; “To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” But if you notice in today’s reading from Luke, Jesus doesn’t mention anything about making disciples. What is it that Jesus commissions his disciples to do? *To proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations in Jesus’ name.* We can talk about morality – human rights, civil rights, social justice, “family values,” and whatnot – but we cannot truly live into the morality that we preach

without first being healed of the deep-seated sickness that has caused us to live immorally. And the healing process must begin with forgiveness and repentance.

Let's look at forgiveness first; in our Gospel lesson today Jesus appears to his disciples and says, "Peace be with you." I think it's significant that the disciples don't explicitly ask for forgiveness and Jesus does not explicitly offer forgiveness, but forgiveness is always implied in peace. As I mentioned to the children last week (and I know that most of you listen to the children's message), peace implies forgiveness; when we pass the peace here, it should be an authentic peace that in essence says, "I forgive you for anything that you've said or done to me." We must offer forgiveness in order to have peace with anyone.

But forgiveness must be offered in the context of repentance; the two go together. We cannot simply be the one who offers forgiveness to those who have offended us; we need to be humble enough to recognize that we may have done something that we may not even be aware of that has hurt or offended the person we're forgiving. We are completely comfortable with being the gracious ones who forgive others their trespasses, but we're not so comfortable casting our eyes *inward* to see what we may need to be forgiven for, and that's why Jesus commissions the disciples to spread the news of forgiveness *and repentance*, because we can be forgiving without being repentant, and unless we're repentant nothing changes. If you have a grudge against someone here and in your passing of the peace you're saying to yourself, "I forgive this person for what he has done to me," that other person may be saying the exact same thing to himself. And does anything change? NO! You will each continually blame the other for the offense that you cause to one another. Repentance acknowledges that there just might be something about you that is causing offense to others, *that it might be your fault!* And in order for there to be true peace between you and the other *you* have to accept that you could be in the wrong. There needs to be true repentance that leads to our own forgiveness in the Church. That's why Jesus commissions us to proclaim both forgiveness and repentance

And repentance and forgiveness must be going on through our entire life. Healing is a process; it has to be, because the sickness that we all carry has held us for millennia. You may remember that several weeks ago I preached on Jesus' encounter with a Syro-Phoenician woman who begs Jesus to heal her daughter, and Jesus in essence calls her a dog, saying that it's not right to feed the dogs when the food that he provides should be reserved for the children of Israel. And I know that it's a real challenge to the way we've been taught about Jesus as being perfect in every way to hear him being dismissive to a foreign woman. And I made the point that Jesus may have grown up in an environment where foreigners were seen as less-than-human. I grew up in Virginia, and in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade I was taught "Virginia History," and part of what we were taught was that slaves were treated very well by their "masters." No doubt there were slave "masters" who were blind to their own sin because they grew up in a culture where they were taught that they were ordained by God to be masters of enslaved people. In order for you and me to be fully healed by God we have to be conscious of things of which we may currently be unconscious. Biases and prejudices can indeed be instilled in us by our culture, but the divine drive for healing requires that we become conscious of those biases so that we may repent of them and stop perpetuating them.

One last note on healing. Healing is not simply the absence of sickness; there are Christians who think that pious living is the essence of Christian's life, thinking in completely negative terms, the "thou shalt not" mentality, it's like they have a checklist in their pocket, and whatever is happening around them they have to look at the list and check that it's not prohibited. They live their lives so careful not to transgress that they never really live life. Healing in Christ is about being and doing everything that God wants you to be and do, and that means enjoying life. And that fits into "passing the peace" because when you truly have peace with others you can start having fun with each other. I read about a young pastor who was having coffee with folks in their fellowship hall when they heard a commotion under one of the tables and looked under it to find a three-year-old boy playing Matchbox cars with one of the highly respected elders of the church, rolling the cars and making *vroom* noises and just having a grand old time. That's what a church should look like. That's what true peace looks like, when we are so fully restored to the image of God that we can find true joy with one another. Healing of the world means not only the *absence of sin*; it also means *the presence of joy*.