

September 27, 2009

Luke 24: Commissioned to Witness

Purpose: To help motivate us to share with others our experience of God in Christ

Key Bible reference: Luke 24.13-53

Key Verse: Luke 24.47

Biblical Interpretation

Luke 24:36-43. Verse 36 introduces the third appearance of the risen Christ recorded in this chapter. Jesus had appeared to the two men on the road to Emmaus (verses 13-33) and to Peter (verse 34). Now, Jesus joins the core group of his followers who had gathered together in Jerusalem.

Think of the astonishment the little group experienced. Jesus spoke words of comfort: "Peace be with you" (verse 36). But the disciples and those with them were startled and terrified, even though they had heard the account of the men who had been with Jesus (verse 35). They thought they were seeing a ghost! Jesus responded to their unspoken concern, asking why they were fearful (verse 38). He invited them to look at his hands and feet, that is, those parts of his body pierced by the Crucifixion; and he encouraged them to touch him, to see that he was a body, not a mere apparition (verse 39). Note that Luke does not say that anyone took Jesus up on the invitation to touch him. However, the importance of this physical verification cannot be stressed too highly; by appealing to bodily evidence, the risen Christ demonstrated his identity with the Jesus the disciples had known and loved. By the same token, this verification established the continuity of the disciples' own stories. The Resurrection was the confirmation of their response to Jesus' original call, the

continuation of the life and work they had started as Jesus' disciples.

Those present were joyful yet doubtful. In fact, they were speechless. To give them further proof, Jesus asked for food and, given a piece of fish, ate it before their eyes. However, the disciples remained skeptical; as we shall see, not until Jesus had instructed them through the explanation of Scripture did they fully realize that they were in the presence of the risen Jesus Christ (verse 52).

Luke 24:44-49. Additional emphasis is given to the continuity between the risen Christ and the Jesus the disciples had known and loved by the reference to the teaching Jesus had shared with his followers: "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you" (verse 44). Through his biblical exegesis, that is, through his interpretation of the Scriptures, Jesus helped the disciples understand his role as the Messiah. He spoke of calling for repentance—change of mind—and forgiveness of sins, precisely the message he had preached throughout his ministry. This message was to be conveyed to all peoples; and the missionary effort was to begin in Jerusalem, where his own ministry had reached its climax.

As the disciples and the other followers listened to Jesus' explanation of God's plan of salvation, their minds were opened (verse 45); and they began to grasp their own vocation in spreading the good news of God's love revealed in Jesus

Christ. They were commissioned to carry the message of salvation to the world because they had been "witnesses of these things" (verse 48). Having come to understand the events in which they had participated through Jesus' explanation of Scripture, those to whom the risen Christ had appeared were to share their testimonies with the world. They were eyewitnesses; they had a story to tell. The followers of Jesus were to wait in Jerusalem until the power of the Spirit came upon them (verse 49), then go into the world to tell others what they had seen and heard.

Luke 24:50-53. The Gospel According to Luke concludes with the risen Christ leading the disciples out to Bethany, a village on the eastern slopes of the mount called Olivet. Here Jesus blessed his followers and ascended into heaven. In the Book of Acts, also written by Luke, there is an expanded account of this farewell and ascension (Acts 1:1-12).

Verse 52 reports that the disciples worshiped Jesus; this is their true recognition of the risen Christ. Although Jesus withdrew from them and was taken up into heaven (verse 51), they were not discouraged. Believing that he would send the Spirit promised by the Father (verse 49) to help them accomplish the task he had given them (verses 47-48), the disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy (verse 53).