

Luke 24:36-49

When asked about our families' histories, we tend to be rather proud, don't we? We don't mind saying that our families came over from Europe; that they suffered hardships, but worked hard to provide a place and a name for their descendants. We'll talk about the places our grandparents lived; what they did to earn a living. Our roots—the beginnings of our family trees—are very important to us.

And this is also true of our church family. We hold rather dear to our hearts the rich history of our congregation. We put on display, pictures not only of present members, but also of members and events from the past. We're proud of our Lutheran heritage; what was handed down to us by Luther and the Reformers. And if we go back farther, much farther—to the beginnings of the New Testament Church, and even just before that time—to Easter Sunday and the gathering of those early Christians—Jesus' disciples huddled together...we may not, all of a sudden, be so proud. We might even be a little embarrassed—ashamed that we trace our Christian Faith to these frightened little men who just could not believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

They saw. They heard. They touched...but they still could not believe. Jesus appeared to them. He showed them the nail marks in His hands and feet. They heard His voice. "Touch Me," He said to them. He even ate fish in their presence to prove that He was no ghost. All this, and yet they had trouble believing that this figure in their midst was the Risen Lord. And these are the men Jesus calls His "witnesses." These frightened, doubting, confused men are they who have written the things that we believe about Jesus Christ and His resurrection. Makes us rather...proud...doesn't it?

But then, I suppose we have little room to talk. We're not exactly "pillars of the faith" are we? We point our finger at those disciples' unbelief, but we're just as guilty. If we really believed, without any doubt, that the living Lord Jesus Christ is here in our midst, we would raise the roof with our singing of these Easter hymns. If we really believed that the living Lord is truly, bodily present in the bread and wine for us, we would never miss an opportunity to eat this sacred meal—and we'd ask why we can't have it more often. If we really believed that the Risen Christ is present to bless us with a stronger faith whenever we read His Word, we would open our Bibles every day. If we really believed that the living Lord Jesus Christ forgives us all our sins, you and I would hold no grudges against those who wrong us—we would forgive them.

It seems to me that there is never a time in the history of the Church when all is well; when faith is strong; when doubts are held in check and unbelief is removed. The confusion, doubts, and unbelief of those early disciples is alive and well, and living within us. Will we make it? Will we survive? Not, will the Church survive...will you and I survive all the troubles without and the unbelief within? If it was up to us, no. Not one of us, as Luther says, would remain a Christian in this world even for a minute.

Thank God it's not up to us. In looking at our text more closely, there's something that stands out. Did you catch it? It's this: the only one doing all the action is Jesus. The disciples were simply huddled together. Jesus appears in their midst. "Peace be with you," He gives them. They are startled and troubled. Jesus calms their fears with words of comfort. He shows them His hands and feet. They're still not believing, so Jesus eats fish

before them. He reminds them of what is written in the Scriptures about Him. He opens their minds to understand the Scriptures.

The disciples are like infants in a nursery—frightened, confused, and so needy. And Jesus, like a caring nurse, is giving them all that they need. He doesn't give up on them. He tends to them. They are helpless, "closed-minded," confused. He doesn't punish them, He does everything for them. The word of peace He gives them—that's forgiveness...He forgives them. He is patient with them. It's not the "three strikes and you're out" rule...He keeps giving them convincing proofs to show them that He really is the living Lord. He opens their minds. He breaks through their stubborn unbelief and shows them that the Scriptures are all about Him. He turns on the light in their minds. He takes the blindfolds off their eyes. He unplugs their ears.

In this entire text in Luke 24, that pretty much sums up what's happening. The disciples cannot act. They are startled, amazed, dumbfounded. So Jesus acts on their behalf. If this is the beginnings of the Early Church, then we see here a pretty clear reflection of the Church today and everyday—of your life and mine within the Church, and of every Christian. Jesus' Christians are not "pillars." We're helpless, confused, bewildered, unbelieving people. But Jesus is the One who is taking action for us. Everything He did for them He does for you. "Peace" He gives you. The peace that passes all understanding, but puts our hearts at peace, because it means that He has forgiven our sins, is yours. At the font and at the Holy Supper, Jesus opens His wounds for you, so that you may have that peace which those wounds purchased. There may be many things in life which confuse you. You may not understand all the things of God. But this is yours, and no one can take it from you—Jesus gives you His peace. Peace with which to live in, and peace in which to die. There is peace for you with God because God forgives you.

To convince you, Jesus does not eat fish with you, as He did with them. But He has you eat of His body and blood. This is no Lutheran "potluck." This is the meal of the Resurrection. The living Lord gives you life eternal with His true flesh and blood. Through this eating, Jesus convinces you, as He did for His disciples then, that He is risen for you, for He comes to us in the bread and wine with His living flesh to eat that we may live because of Him.

Everything Jesus did for His helpless disciples He does for you. And those disciples did finally believe, didn't they? They believed that Jesus was alive. But it was not because they were good, strong believers in the faith. It was because Jesus nursed them along. And through them, it was Jesus who used their fingers to write down for you the truth of His resurrection so that you, too, may believe.

Do not think that you believe because your mind is so strong. Your mind is closed, like theirs, until Jesus opens it. Through the written words of these men, of whom we are often ashamed, Jesus has acted for you to open your mind, to forgive your sinful heart, to give you the knowledge of salvation through His death and resurrection for you.

Will you and I make it? Will we survive the troubles without and the unbelief within our hearts? Friend, take comfort in knowing that Jesus is patient with you. Jesus does not punish you for your doubting heart. He pardons you. He gives you words of life. He nurses you in the weakness of your flesh. As you listen to His Word; as you eat of His

sacred meal, you can be assured, beyond any doubt, that Jesus acts on your behalf, just as much as He did for His disciples back then.

Will doubts and confusion always be in our minds? Will unbelief always live within our hearts? Yes, for we are weak and sinful. But Christ is our strength. In Him we trust. In His Word do we put our hope. As long as the words of Jesus reach our ears; as long as His body and blood reaches our mouths, we have confidence and hope, for this is how the Risen Lord keeps us in the one, true faith.

It's not about how proud you are of your family's history. It's not how ashamed you may be of yourself and how you have lived. It's all about Jesus. The Scriptures are all about Him. Life, and death, is all about Him. He is the One who acts for you. He is the One who died and rose for you. He is the One who forgives you. He gives you peace. He gives you faith. He gives His word of life to you to keep you in faith. Friend, as we look at ourselves, we can thank God that it is not about us, but all about Christ. In Him, the Risen Lord Jesus Christ, you have eternal life. Amen.