**Luke 24:36-49 April 18, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Luke the 24th chapter here re-reading these words. “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

How unbelievable was it for the disciples to see Jesus after he rose from the dead, and after hearing the testimony or even we could say, witness of the disciples who were with Jesus on the road to Emmaus? Well, Luke goes so far as to say that even after they *knew* it was him, they disbelieved for joy and were marveling. To put it simply it was so unbelievable that they had trouble believing it, even when it was right in front of their face. This is where we get our exclamation of “I don’t believe it” even when we see it right in front of us, even as it’s happening before our very eyes. So have you had any “I don’t believe it” moments? I’m not talking about small instances where you were surprised by something like a few more dollars on a tax return or your favorite sports team miraculously coming back and winning a game. I’m talking about something in your life that was so inconceivable that when it did happen, it wasn’t possible to believe, even though it was happening. Moments when you disbelieve out of joy, because of how amazing it is that this is finally happening.

That’s the joy the disciples had in our Gospel lesson this morning. It’s the joy that Luke tries to explain and express in these few short words as Jesus appears to them and truly destroys any doubt that they could have possibly had that he had truly risen from the dead. Our Gospel lesson speaks in the very beginning about the disciples gathered together talking about “those things” and when we look at the overall context of Luke 24, this is a chapter of the Gospels that encompasses a variety of topics and scenes. This is the final chapter of the Gospel of Luke, beginning with the Resurrection as the women tell the disciples about Jesus rising from the dead, and it ends with the Ascension of our Lord. In between are two texts, our Gospel lesson today and the more famous “Road to Emmaus account” where Jesus appears to two disciples who are discussing what happened to him, and where he opens their minds to the truth of the Scriptures. Those disciples run back and tell the other disciples what happened, and that’s where we pick up in our Gospel lesson today. Jesus appears to them again and immediately declares to them the same peace that he has brought to everyone he has met since He rose from the dead.

And all of this seems, in a way, unbelievable. At least it did to the disciples. And in the same way we are tempted with the same doubt that they experienced today. The disciples feared that Jesus could be some kind of spirit, or even a demon masquerading as their Savior and teacher, and we know that demon possession was prevalent during their day, and still remains in our world today. They had doubts and they had fears. We know this because of what Jesus himself says “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” They weren’t sure what they were seeing. Like the Gospel lesson from last week with Thomas they naturally wanted some kind of proof.

We all struggle with doubts, especially as we move into a deeper understanding of God’s Word. As we move from the simple understandings of our Christian faith to the meatier and heavier sections of Holy Scripture our sinful nature naturally begins…to doubt. Doubt that a snake would talk to Adam and Eve. Doubt that Moses could part the Red Sea, or that Jonah could be swallowed by a giant fish. Doubt that Jesus could really be born of a virgin….or especially in this Easter season, that Jesus could truly rise from the dead. Doubts rise up because all around us is doubt. If there’s one thing we’ve seen in this past year it’s that we have doubts! Experts, scientists, health officials, your brother, sister, uncle, aunt, whoever you want to name as the authoritative one who talks to you about health and safety in your life, we’ve all this past year heard what we should do or what we need to do concerning our health and we’ve doubted! We’ve seen doubt and skepticism run rampant. We live in a society of doubt, that loves to destroy truth and authoritative proof. We live in a world of doubters, who plant seeds of doubt in our minds and trouble our spirit by attempting to destroy the truth that is revealed to us in the Gospel and in the Bible by removing the Bible entirely from our secular lives. Doubts remain all around us, and we all have had doubts about God in our lives.

And as we talked about and looked at earlier disbelief came for the disciples even when they saw the truth right before their eyes. This is true for us as well. But instead of our disbelief coming from joy our disbelief comes from familiarity. We too have the privilege to witness Jesus Christ in His Word and in His Sacraments every Sunday morning here in His house, and yet we disbelieve, even when he is right in front of us. We are all witnesses of that truth, in the times when we fail to enthusiastically come and receive God’s gifts and in the times when we neglect the study of God’s Word. In the times when we neglect the reception of His sacraments. In the moments when we fail to appreciate the proclamation of His Law and Gospel. We all have sinned and fallen astray, we have given into doubt and disbelief and we must, as Peter urges in our First reading from Acts. “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus.”

And there was refreshment for the disciples. For Jesus shows him his hands, and his feet, and his side. As we sang in the popular Lent hymn When I survey the wondrous cross, “See from his head, his hands, his feet. Sorrow and *love* flow mingled down.” This is the same man. The same one who was crucified and died in order to save His people from their sins. The disciples saw this first hand and the amazing and joyous revelation of that truth is what made them disbelieve, for they were so happy that He had risen just as He said. And when Jesus asks for something to eat it’s not because he’s suddenly famished and starving from the journey to Emmaus or returning miraculously before them. In his state of exaltation he has no need for the food that they give him, yet he eats it anyway as further proof, that He still remains a man. That he still has *fellowship* with them, as their Savior, as the same man who traveled with them, ate with them, and prayed with them.

Doubts are destroyed in the presence of the truth, their doubts couldn’t stand when faced with the evidence of His body and his bodily eating. Further evidence was given to the disciples when Jesus opened their minds to the Scriptures and the fact that Jesus was the fulfillment of these Scriptures written so long ago by Moses and the prophets. And we have that same evidence today. If anything we have more than the disciples did, because we have the testimony of the witnesses. We have the full scope and picture of Christ’s work of redemption because we can follow the covenant through the Old Testament. We can see God’s hand working through Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, through David and the prophets, all the way to Joseph and Bethlehem, to Jerusalem and Golgatha, and finally from Jerusalem and all the ends of the earth as that Gospel message spread and was proclaimed to everyone. We are witnesses that happened. We are witnesses to the fulfillment of this charge that was given to these men, because we sit here, in the presence of their testimony, in the presence of His Word, and in the presence of Jesus Christ himself.

Because that is what is being preached to you today. That in the moments of doubt in your lives when you are faced with the world’s lies and deception that you cling to the cross. That you cling to the evidence of salvation and life everlasting: the Word of God. And that you repent of your doubts, and be refreshed by the truth. The truth that your sins have been forgiven. That you have life eternal thanks to His death and resurrection. That by *His* wounds you are healed. And that from this pulpit and from the pulpits of the Churches here in Michigan and scattered all around the world, repentance and forgiveness of sins is being preached. The joyous words and hymns of praise in our hymnal and in our liturgy are being chanted, and spoken and sung. And we are joining with the Church eternal, in songs of praise and adoration, of telling the story of Jesus Christ, to destroy any doubt in our heart that Jesus has risen from the dead, and that we are His children.

So come this day, receive his gifts, be strengthened in your faith, the faith created in your heart that believes the truth of the Gospel. For we ourselves can’t by our own reason or strength believe the truth of God’s Word and his promises, but we believe through faith, faith created in our hearts, the work of the Holy Spirit for our benefit. Let that remain a comfort for you, in the moments when life can be unbelievable. May God’s unbelievable love for you remain a comfort and peace all the days of your life.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.