

April 26 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 136:1-9, 23-26

I John 3:1-3

Luke 24:36-48

Sermon *What Does It Mean?*

You have heard today's Gospel, at least the pattern of today's Gospel elsewhere in Luke the appearance of the risen Christ, the disciple's failure to know him, a meal, the opening of the Scriptures, recognition of Jesus, wonder and then joy. Someone has said that in these verses there is a pattern which we see every Sunday morning worship. This morning I intend to focus on the centrality of the Scriptures and the way that the risen Christ opens the meaning of the Scriptures to us. The Scriptures that Jesus is talking about are the Hebrew Scriptures the things that he read when he was a child. Remember that the earliest of the Christian's Scripture of the New Testament were the letters of Paul and those would not be written for several years after the crucifixion. If you would like to read along with me, I will be reading Luke chapter 24 and beginning with verse 36.

“While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 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.’ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

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.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 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, And repentance and the forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. See I am sending upon you what my Father promised. So here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’”

We have just read from the Bible. You were probably not surprised because, after all, we read from the Bible every Sunday and now I am preaching. When I preach, you expect me in some fashion to preach from the Bible. You are not primarily interested in hearing about my pet peeves or my latest political concerns. You

came to hear from the Bible this morning, yet that isn't easy we have had recently some nasty fighting in the church of Jesus Christ Universal. Most of these fights have come from conflicts about listening to or interpreting scripture. But in all of these arguments about the Bible there is a basic question. Is the Bible true? Is the Bible true? I just read about how risen Christ returned to his disciples and when he appeared to them they didn't recognize him at first, but then Christ explain to them, when he read Scriptures to them and as he did so, it says, their minds were opened and they believed Is that true? Is that true?

Consider first what we mean when we say that we mean something is true. The truth of a statement depends on what it means and how it means and what it means for instance if you read a novel from John Gresham, you might say, *The Chamber*, one of his books. Is it really true about the American legal system? You don't mean it is a high witness account of an actual trial or a historical accurate report of some event. Of course you mean it reveals how things really are for better or for worse within our courts. It is a revealing novel but it is not history. On the other hand if you read a biography by Duma Moreland, you are not expecting the author to make up fanciful events or manufacture dialogue. It is revealing history but it is not a novel. So both the novel and the biography are true but they are true in their own way They operate by different rules. We have ways of acknowledging when these rules come in place. So when we hear, "Did you hear about the farmer who," you know you are going to hear a joke and not history. Or if you hear someone .say, "Did you hear about the traveling salesman who", you know that this might be an unrepeatable joke. You will react to what you hear by certain rules and not others. I don't come away from a performance. *Joseph and the Amazing the Tec color Green Coat*, asking was true? Did the event happen just the way they were depicted by Andrew Lloyd Webber? I know better than that. It is a play, it is a musical. It is true in the way that plays are fanciful creations.

Another example in Springfield, Ill. there is a statue of Abraham Lincoln swinging a large axe in the direction of some chains which are restraining some slaves. Is this work of art true? No. Is it actually true? Did Lincoln ever pick up an axe to break the chains of slaves? True but not factual history.

Preachers are always looking for antidotes that may be used for illustrations in sermons. When my favorite professors heard, Joey Jeter, who was one of ten most important preachers in the English-speaking world he was impressed. Joey Jeter died about a month ago. He was from my denomination. I am particularly proud of him and I took a class under him when I was in seminary. He was a wonderful man, lover of God, lover of Christ a wonderful man. My professor. tells how when he heard-Joey Jeter give a sermon one time. He had a wonderful illustration that just fit the sermon perfectly. It fit it to a T. After he gave that sermon, he said, "Did that story really happen?" He smiled and said every day. Answer this question was

the story that He told was a true story or not? Clearly it was not factual. But was it true? Was it the way that things really are? Probably not.

One of our challenges in reading the Bible, the Bible is full of all sorts of different types of literature. So when Jesus says "A certain man was going down the road to Jericho," you know you are going to hear a parable, not history not poetry. So you say the parable of the Good Samaritan is true you realize you are speaking of particular kind of truth delivered in a particular way. The late William Kaufman, the former chaplain of the university, said the Genesis account of the creation of the world may not be scientifically true; it is eternally true. Perhaps a geology textbook can tell us about when the world came into being. Genesis tells us about the deep truth about why. Why the world is here why the world got here and not necessarily how it got here. We need to know what sort of literature we are reading in order to deal with and to hear it on its own terms. Even when the Bible is doing history it may not be true in the way that we think of history but it still is wonderfully true. Biblical writers didn't seem to worry much about getting exact details as some of our contemporary historians do. The Biblical historians were interested in deciphering the meaning of the history. The significance of the event in which our contemporaries historians may be interested are useless once again, Biblical writers weren't as concerned as we are of proving how this particular event took place. They were concerned as to why this event took place. We modern people do better with the how or with the when but we do a much poorer job in explaining the why.

Another thing the Bible ought to be taken on its own terms as we are able, that means respecting the distance between the Bible times and our time. The American slave owner who read that slavery was permitted in the Bible and then use the Bible to argue that slavery was morally permissible, they abused the Bible by attempting to transfer what it said in different situations and circumstances to contemporary circumstances of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Now I hope this doesn't make the Bible a hopelessly complicated and impossible book to understand. Is the Bible true? I like to use the analogue that is offered by one of my friend, "He says that when we have a friend whom we trust we recognize their jokes as jokes, their fanciful speech as fanciful speech, we know they won't tell us anything about themselves or about us that would lead us astray. You can trust the Bible in a similar way; it is true it will not lead you astray.

Sunday after Sunday here in church even though we might not always understand the Bible, even though everything we hear may not be an immediate relative to us we do learn to trust it. We trust it because we find that it makes sense of the world. It is not some fake in a never, never land, of wishful thinking but a real world where we can live in faith, like a good friend the Bible may not always tell us what

we want to hear. but it tells us what we might need to hear in order to be more faithful Christians.

For instance in today's Gospel reading the fearful disciples were huddled together after the death of Jesus. What will become of them now? Then without warning the risen Christ comes and stands among them. They don't know what to make of it. Some think he is a ghost. Most of them are just scared. Jesus speaks to them, shows them the scars, his hands and feet, joins them in their meal, eats the fish before them, and then begins to explain the Scriptures. Luke says he opens their mind to understanding the Scriptures. This is really happening. Did it really happen just the way that Luke tells it? I don't know but I do know what does happen. Maybe not this Sunday or every Sunday but what Luke describes truly happens. It happens right in our church and others not because of anything that I have said or Russ might say because of the spirit of God moves among you. Think of the Sundays you have come here desponded, worried about what was ahead of you in the next week and not knowing why you are here or which way to turn and as we move through the service something happens there is a presence, mysterious inexplicable but never less real which makes me wonder if in today's Gospel we are not reading history but a kind of parable, a parable of Sunday morning here in our church. A truthful depiction of why we are here. We are not here because we understand everything in the Bible. We are not here because our faith has everything figured out and fixed. We are here as those waiting for Jesus to come and stand among us and he does. He comes as a gift, gift of grace, God's grace to all of us. Jesus really came and stands among the disciples. I believe he did it happens every day. Let us pray