

Knowledge, Faith, Joy, and Praise
Luke 24:44-53
May 13, 2018 – Ascension Sunday

The last verses truly provide a fitting end to Luke's first volume. I say Luke's first volume, because virtually all scholars believe that the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke also wrote the Book of Acts. Yes, I know that, in our Bible, the Gospel of John is between Luke and Acts. Somebody decided that the four Gospels should be grouped together and that Luke should follow Mark. But, trust me. Luke and Acts are a two volume set; and next week we'll get into Acts.

But today, at the end of the Gospel we have this wonderful report of Jesus' last earthly encounter with his disciples. Jesus says, I've told you everything that is written in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms. Then we read that Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures. I like to think of this as the moment the light dawns.

While today's lesson is from Luke, you may be aware that we are in the Lectionary Year of Mark. The Ecumenical Lectionary follows a three year cycle, emphasizing first Matthew, then Mark, then Luke. We are currently in the year of Mark; and, as I have stated before, Mark is not kind to the disciples. If you read Mark's Gospel carefully, the disciples are often, shall we say, "in the dark." They just don't get it. Jesus repeatedly asks, "Do you have ears but not hear? Do you have eyes but not see?" Now, in the disciples defense, I'm really not sure I would have had any more understanding than they did. Some of what was happening around them was pretty bewildering.

But somewhere along the way, the disciples must have "gotten it." They were, after all, responsible for starting the early church; and I'll say a lot more about that next week. But today is the day. Today is the day when Jesus "opened their minds to understand." Hear that moment again, this time from the Common English Bible: "This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations." There's that call again, the call to preach the Good News *to all nations*. But with the call and with the preaching comes a charge – a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins. Friends, if you're hurting, if you're suffering, the news doesn't get any better than this – a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins. It's a call for the disciples to preach; and it's a call for the hearers to change, to turn, to repent, to follow the teaching for the forgiveness of sins, indeed for a new life in Jesus Christ.

Jesus continues. "You're the witnesses of these things. You're the ones. You're the people who must spread the news. If you don't who will? There is no

one else.” But it’s sometimes been said, “God won’t ask you to do something without giving you the resources.” So next comes the promise of resources – power. Jesus says, I’m sending the power, but you need to be patient and wait. Wait in the city until you have been given the power from on high.

So I submit, the first part of this lesson is about knowledge. Jesus has opened the minds of the disciples. Jesus has helped the disciples understand what the past months that they spent with him were all about. Jesus has helped the disciples understand who he really is and what it means to be Messiah, divine Son of God.

It’s probably no surprise to you that I greatly value knowledge. How can one have faith without knowledge. We need to have faith in something and/or someone. I have faith in my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ because I know the Good News of Jesus Christ, I sometimes say “The Good News of the Gospel”; but the very word *Gospel* means “Good News.” Of course, we also use the word Gospel to mean the book, the writings about the Good News.

One of our Guiding Principles is “We provide varied opportunities for people to grow in their faith.” There are a lot of ways people grow in faith. You can grow in faith by doing mission work and seeing the love that grows out of that work. You can grow in faith by praise, by worship, by sacrament. But I submit to you, one of the primary ways Christians grow in faith is by reading, studying, and meditating on the word of God.

When I first came to this church I asked, “What Bible study do you have?” And I was told, “Well, it’s been a while since we’ve had a Bible Study outside of Sunday Worship and sometimes Sunday School. My response was “Wait no longer. This book is too important to not give it our full attention on a regular basis.”

Our lesson today says that Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the scriptures – an ah-ha moment. Now, we’re not likely to have any major ah-ha moments taking Bible study at NOUMC – maybe a few minor ones. And, the opening of our minds may be a more gradual process than that of Jesus’ disciples, but it’s none the less important because knowledge is central to faith; and, as those in our Daniel Plan Group will tell you, faith is essential to a healthy life.

Then comes the next part of today’s lesson. We’re told the disciples worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem overwhelmed with joy. I’ve tried to put myself in their shoes. My leader, my mentor, my savior has just left me. Before he left, he gave me this commission: “A change of heart and life, a repentance, for the forgiveness of sins must be preached to all the nations”; and Jesus gave the power to do that.” That’s a big job, but it’s also an exciting job.

I remember well, the evening of June 17, 2008, the date of my ordination. I remember well our bishop laying his hands on my head and telling me to *take authority* to preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments of the church; and it was a joyful event. I had just taken a vow to go wherever the bishop sends me to do just that – preach the Word and administer the sacraments – hugely exciting and extremely joyful. It’s also a little bit scary.

There are a few others among us who I’m sure also remember there ordination day; and there may be some among us who will one day in the future have that same experience. But, whether you are ever ordained or not, I tell you there is joy in serving the risen Christ. There is joy in mission work. There is joy in work within the church. There are many challenges, yes. But there is also great joy.

And this brings me to my final point. The disciples were continuously in the temple praising God. Worship!!! Out of the faith, out of the knowledge, in the experience of joy, it is appropriate and indeed necessary to praise the source of all knowledge and all joy. It happens frequently that someone will tell me they can’t make it to church. They have something else to do. Usually, I just politely acknowledge that, and we move on. But in my head lingers the question: “What do you have to do that is more important than praising God?”

Every minister I know is majorly upset by the number of youth sporting events – soccer, little league, softball, and the like that happen on Sunday mornings. Are these events really more important than praising God? I once had a mother in my congregation who told her children, “Church is more important. If you need to be at soccer on Sunday morning to play soccer, I’m sorry; but you’re not going to play soccer.” I really respected that. That’s hard to do. I’ve never even suggested that to a parent. But still I know, if more parents were to do that, there would be fewer Sunday morning soccer games.

We are called to praise God – not because God needs are praise, but because we need to extend our praise. Through our praise, we enter into an ever closer relationship with the living God; and in that relationship we experience that amazing love of God in fuller richer ways. And I tell you, the children of that mother who insisted on church attendance in lieu of soccer gained more in the their spiritual formation, in the love of God that would shape their lives, than they would have ever gained in a Sunday morning soccer league.

The last verses of Luke are about Knowledge, Faith, Joy, and Praise. They are addressed to the disciples; the first century disciples and the twenty-first century disciples. They are addressed to you and to me. May each of us grow fuller in knowledge, grow closer in faith, and grow stronger in joy that we may forever extend our praise at all times and in all places to the God of all creation.

Let us pray. . .

Most holy and ever gracious God,
Walk with us, lead us, and guide us
that we might grow in knowledge and faith and joy,
and that through our growth we might spread the good news
of your amazing love to all people;
as we extend to you our praise, this day and forever more.
Amen.

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