

Luke 24:36-49 – No Short Cuts

Lutherans don't like seeing the figure of the crucified Christ on the cross. Many of us prefer an empty cross. But what does the empty cross prove? In the same way, the empty tomb does not say much. It does not tell us that Christ is risen but only that His body no longer resides in the grave. No, an empty cross and an empty tomb are not enough. Even the enemies of Jesus prepared for the prospect that Jesus' body would turn up missing and some would claim Him raised from the dead. An empty grave is no proof of the resurrection just as an empty cross does not prove sin's debt is paid.

No one knows this better than Jesus. Jesus knows we need Him standing among His people, extending His wounds that won salvation, and opening the Scriptures so we might know this was the plan all along. This is what we find when Jesus has another conversation on the road with people who thought perhaps Jesus had not risen but had come back as a ghost.

What does Jesus do with these people? He does not condemn them – though He might. He does not chastise them – though He could. No, He meets them in their fears and doubts, shows them His hands and feet, and shows them how He is the message of the Scriptures and the cross was always God's plan.

That is where we come in. We still come as people wearing doubt and living in fear. We need more than a what if or what might be. We need to know the Jesus whom we know suffered and died and that He rose again and that this was God's plan all along. Anything less than that and we will be captive to fear.

Jesus asked them why they were troubled, why they doubted but He already knew why. They need more than a ghost Savior and the hope of some vague spiritual existence to replace this life. He shows them His hands and feet – not reluctantly as if these were an embarrassment to Him but proudly as one displays the scars of victory.

Jesus' wounds are not His shame but His victory. He was obedient unto death. The cross is not an embarrassment to Christians but the sign of our hope. On this cross Jesus suffered and died and now the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen will be proclaimed to every corner of the world. What happened on the cross is not a bad memory to be forgotten but saving truth that must be remembered at all times to call all people to hope.

Jesus insists that He can only be known through His suffering and death. Easter cannot exist without Good Friday. We have nothing to celebrate on Easter unless Christ was first crucified, suffered in our place for our sins, and died our death to set us free. Jesus Christ and Him crucified – the one Gospel.

The cross was not some back up plan God had to resort to when His first plan, the commandments failed to save us. No, God always knew what must be done to save us. He was prepared to pay this price to redeem us even before He had created us. This is the nature of God's love for us. Forgiveness had to be bought with suffering and only Jesus' suffering.

So we proclaim Jesus Christ and Him crucified, we raise up Christ whose body bore the full weight of suffering on the cross, because this is the Gospel. We cannot build our hope on anything less than Christ and Him crucified. You cannot rush into Easter and skip Good Friday.

This is what we are witnesses of – not that the grave was empty or the body was taken down from the cross – all of which are perfectly true. No, we are witnesses of the death that gives life, of the suffering that paid sin's price, and of the reconciliation with the Father which Jesus accomplished by His suffering and death. To say Christ and Him crucified does not diminish Easter but is the only framework in which Easter makes a difference.

So Jesus met with those folks on the road, ate with them to prove the resurrection is not an illusion and spoke to them how all of Scripture promised this one for all, once for all story. There is salvation in Christ and in no other.

We want to get to Easter without Good Friday. We want a cross that lets us forget how Jesus won our salvation. We want the cross empty and our joy full. But it happens only when we behold Good Friday, trust in Easter's hope, and believe that Christ did it all for you ... for me.

Christians need the whole story. The righteous life that has the power to make us sinners righteous. The obedient suffering that pays the debt of sin not with silver or gold but with Jesus' flesh and blood. The death that is not His shame but the power of our Lord and the hope on which we build our everyday lives. The resurrection which is not icing on the cake after our best life now but the perfect life that always escapes us here and gives us what this mortal life has only in glimpses and pieces.

The Scriptures give us nothing less than Jesus whose incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection are the only means to our salvation and the only hope on which to build an eternal tomorrow. The cross is the scandal of the Gospel but it is also the power of the Gospel. Only in this way will Jesus be known, sins forgiven, people called to repentance, the broken healed, the dying comforted, and the dead raised. Only the Gospel of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection has the power to break down walls, unite different people, and reclaim a world from its prison of death. We are witnesses of these things; Christ is risen ... He is risen indeed!