

Being Alive in Christ, How Do You Know It?

April 26, 2009

Luke ends his Resurrection stories with one final visit in the upper room from Jesus. Here again we have Jesus sharing with the disciples and talking about spreading the word to the whole world. And again, there is doubt and fear among the disciples. We can not fathom the level of dread and fear that these followers went through following Jesus' arrest and crucifixion.

Jesus begins with giving them Peace. The Hebrew word or concept here is Shalom, meaning Peace or wholeness or completeness. It is not the absence of conflict, but a complete sense of wellbeing, of being filled up.

Jesus satisfies the hungry heart. He can fill the holes that are forever empty and nag at us...the aching emptiness of the soul. He brings healing and much more...he brings JOY. "Peace be unto you" is more than a simple greeting. Joy is at the heart of Jesus' kingdom message. He compared the Kingdom of God to a wedding feast or reception and said that he came that we might have life and have it in abundance. He said that he came that His Joy might be in us and that our Joy might be made FULL.

It begins with an experience of the Risen Jesus that we each must have, in which he give us peace of heart...satisfying our longings and healing our hurts and helping us. Where and how is unique to each of us...we find our souls filled up and we find peace within, His peace. If you haven't found it yet, do not lose heart, you are on the right track and you are in the right place...truly.

Ask Him for it..Right now. Let's pray.

We ask that you would fulfill your promise in each person here...that you would touch each heart and each life, and bring peace

that is indescribable...that is beyond human understanding and circumstance. Pour out your spirit and fill us with your peace. Like gentle rain or like a blowing hurricane, like the spirit's moving in our hearts too deep for human words...fill us, Lord Jesus, move aside our prideful barriers, our intellectual stubbornness, our cultural fears of losing control, all that might stand in the way of your peace....for we trust you who love us enough to go to the cross with our names upon your lips, who loves us enough to come just for us, just for us.

Second, Jesus addressed their doubts. We talked about doubts in more detail last week when we talked about our dear friend “doubting Thomas”. But doubts are often steps to deeper understanding and stronger faith, if we address them honestly. If we open them up to God and to our friends in the faith (who should not be judgmental, but encouraging and helpful). God is a partner with us in thinking and exploring questions and finding answers. Jesus addresses their questions...he shows them his hands, feet and sides. He eats some broiled fish to show he is not a ghost...for ghosts don't eat!

When we doubt, we should talk to God about them...God can take it! We should read the scripture and search it for answers first, then read widely Christian and non Christian authors, and talk to other people...even Christian pastors who are educated (I mean, come on, I own something like 10,000 books). Often when people have doubts, they go unaddressed and lead to a crisis of faith because they don't honestly look at all the evidence or writing on the subjects.

Third, Scripture is key. Jesus opens the mind of the Apostles, to enable them to remember everything and to write it in these ways. The Gospels are inspired works, not just the works of men. That is one of the differences between them and other works out there. Here Jesus opens their minds and breathes the Holy Spirit upon them. These teachings still have their personal touches and imprints upon them, but

they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. They contain the Word of God...they did not fall from heaven, but they are heavenly. They tell the stories of Jesus and God uses them. God uses them in inspired ways. And God will use them in our lives. The more we know the scripture, read them and use them, the stronger our faith will be and the more blessed we will be .

Jesus gave the Church the task of sharing the word with the world. He specifically told the church to witness to what it had seen...to witness to what Jesus had done for them...and to preach repentance and forgiveness to all nations/peoples, starting in Jerusalem! No group is excluded, no one is too sinful, too far from God's concern or love.

The story the church is to tell is really a love story.

How God so loved the world that he sent his only Son into the world. When he came, he choose these men and women (the disciples...ordinary, everyday sinners like you and me...nobody special, fisherman, tax collectors, homemakers, farmers, merchants, shopkeepers, poor people, rich people, young, old, Jew, Gentile,). He came and walked and worked and taught us. He showed us what true love was by what he said and more importantly by what he did. But the world was sinful and would not accept him. They rejected God's only Son and put him to a humiliating and painful death reserved for the lowest criminal.

Now you might think that God would then reject humanity, or at least reject the sinful ones. That there would be judgment and fire and brimstone! But if the truth is told, we are all sinners and we all reject God's love in one way or another and we all hurt each other sometimes...but God is so loving that he does not do that. Jesus, while suffering on the cross, was praying for us and for those who were killing him, asking God to forgive them.

And so God does forgive us, all of us, sinners in Jesus. All we need do is come to the truth: repent and believe. Anyone anywhere, even the worst sinner. Come, sinner, come, be made alive in Christ. That is the simple message of the church...we are sinners who have come to the knowledge of the truth...that we are forgiven in the awesomeness of God's amazing love.

We are his witnesses. We have experienced it for ourselves. We are not superior to anyone. Far from it. we know we are sinners. The story of Christianity is really the story of one beggar telling another where to find the generous king who is giving away loaves of bread and rooms in the palace! Come and see the great and generous King...who loves us so...he is Risen and he rules with Love and mercy for all! AMEN, Hallelujah! AMEN.