

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

³⁷They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

⁴⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate it in their presence.

⁴⁴He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

⁴⁵Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:36-49)

It’s True! Jesus Rose!

This past Tuesday, at pastors conference, one of the pastors from Ann Arbor told us a true story. A number of years ago, he attended a funeral. The preacher gave a beautiful sermon about going to heaven and the promise of the resurrection because Jesus died and rose for us. Afterwards, the pastor from Ann Arbor told the preacher how much he appreciated the sermon. And the preacher told him, “I don’t believe a word of it. I just said all that because it’s what people want to hear and it pays the bills. But I don’t believe any of it.” What a horrible thought! That a pastor could preach about eternal life through Jesus so beautifully that another pastor complimented him on the message, and he doesn’t believe it himself. How could such a thing happen? Maybe there was a time when he did believe. But years of frustration or doubt poisoned his faith and it died. Maybe he never did believe, but he figured the ministry was an easy job. You only work one day a week and so you say what you have to say to get your paycheck. I don’t know.

But I do know that believing Jesus rose from the dead means believing something that goes against everything we experience in our lives. Once people are dead and buried, they’re gone. So accepting that our Lord rose means that we have to accept something that is impossible under any other circumstance. So there’s always going to be a temptation to waffle on whether his body really came out of the grave. Maybe it was a vision, maybe it was his spirit. Maybe this is just a parable with a deeper meaning. In the face of all that pressure, the Holy Spirit gives us the words we have before us this morning. Their point is simple: **It’s true! Jesus rose!**

I.

We begin today in exactly the same place we began last Sunday – in the locked room where the disciples had gathered on evening of the first Easter. Last week, we looked at how John described what happened that night. Today, we’re looking at Luke’s description. Luke gives us a different perspective with different details. But his point is exactly the same: **It’s true! Jesus rose! It really happened!**

In the verses just before our reading, the two Emmaus disciples had just come in. They had walked and talked with Jesus without realizing who he was. When he broke bread with them, he showed them who he was and disappeared. So they raced back to Jerusalem to share the good news. When they came in, the other disciples told them, **“It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.”** The disciples confessed their faith in the risen Savior! Then Jesus appeared right there. And they were terrified. They leaped to the conclusion that they were seeing a ghost.

What happened to their faith? It appears to have evaporated. Their reaction shows just how weak and frail the human heart is – even the heart of a believer. It’s just not natural for us to trust what God says and does. We’re all born unbelievers. So what’s natural is for us to believe almost anything other than what God says. It takes a miracle of God to make believers out of born sinners. God did do that miracle for us. But for as long as we live here, we have to fight the tendency to revert back to the default setting – disbelief and even fear

of what God says and does. Again and again, we have to discover and rediscover what God says is true and what God says we're supposed to believe. At one minute, we can be so sure and so strong in our confession. And a minute later, we can be hopelessly lost in confusion and doubt – doubt that could grow into pure unbelief.

We need to hear that Jesus has risen for as long as we live, because if we let them, these sinful hearts will slowly drift away from that truth. It won't happen all at once. But gradually, one tiny step at a time, they will put more and more distance between us and the gospel. And any one of us could one day find ourselves in the position of that pastor who preached the gospel without believing a word of it.

That's why today again for the third Sunday in row we hearing that Jesus really did rise. God gave us this message to fight against that sin in our hearts. Jesus told the disciples, **“Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”** He was proving to them that the gospel was true. His body had come out of the grave. They still had trouble believing it – but now it was because of joy and amazement. They were like those people who win the lottery and put their hands to their faces and say, “I just don't believe it!” So Jesus did the final proof: he ate their own food in front of them. The Greek word our Bible translates as “ghost” really means “spirit.” A spirit is not a physical body. When they could touch him, when he could eat and swallow real food, Jesus proved that his body had really come back to life.

There are so many people today who deny that. Jehovah's Witnesses say that the body stayed dead, but his spirit rose. Liberal theologians say the disciples stole the body and that the resurrection is the preaching of the early church, but it isn't literally true. Many people today are expecting life after death, but they don't really believe their bodies will come out of the grave. But my friends, here today, Jesus says to all of us that we will rise because he did rise. Since he rose, all that sin and weakness in our hearts is forgiven. That forgiveness is the key to making sure we never wind up where that poor pastor wound up. Our faith will remain alive as long as we understand that his resurrection means eternal life for us. We weren't just born ignorant of God. We were born enemies of God. And the sin inside us wants to abandon what God says and revel in our own thinking and in the thinking of this world. That rebellion against God deserves hell. But Jesus died and he paid for the sin we were born with. He died and he paid for all of our weakness and rebellion. He rose to tell us we are forgiven. Every moment of weakness is wiped away. Every doubt is erased from God's record. Every sin has been paid for. And every time we hear that, God works in our hearts to keep our faith strong.

II.

That's what Jesus did for the disciples that Sunday evening. He brought them the gospel to strengthen their faith. That was no different from what he had been doing for the last three years. It was no different from what God had been doing since the Garden of Eden. That gives us an important perspective: **It's true! Jesus rose! God promised that would happen!**

Jesus said, **“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”** Jesus had taught them about himself for three years. In the weeks and months running up to his crucifixion, he repeatedly told them in so many words that he was going to be arrested, tried, executed and then on the third day, he would rise. When he taught them that, he was continuing the central message of the Scriptures. The whole Bible, the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, is about Jesus.

When he said, “the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” he was talking about the way that the Jews organized their Bibles. In Jesus' day nobody had a printed Bible. Their Bibles were hand written on scrolls. Those scrolls were awkward and heavy. So it took a number of scrolls to make a complete Bible. Jewish scholars organized their collections into the scrolls of Moses, the scrolls of the prophets and the other scrolls, called the writings or sometimes, the psalms because the book of psalms took up five scrolls all by itself. So when Jesus said these words, his disciples heard him say, “Everything that is written about me in the whole Bible” – which at that time was only the Old Testament.

What did God say about Jesus in the Old Testament? Jesus explained, **“This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”** Hundreds of years before it happened, God told his people a Savior was coming. That Savior would suffer and die for their sins. Then he would rise from the dead. The gospel of forgiveness would go out into all the world. On the first Easter, all that God promised came true. Of course, the disciples didn't understand it until that day. They had to see how it all came out to understand what God was really doing. We have an advantage over them: we've known all our lives how the

story comes out. But that doesn't change the miracle here. For thousands of years, God prepared the world for this moment when Jesus would rise. When the time was right, God kept that promise. In that promise, he gives you and me eternal life.

III.

But only because we know the promise. That's why Jesus came to the disciples that night. He was going to send them out with the good news. They had to know it was true so we can know it. My friends, **it's true! Jesus rose! God wants the whole world to know it happened.**

Jesus told the disciples, **"You are witnesses of these things."** God entrusted the salvation of the world to witnesses. In forty more days Jesus was going to ascend into heaven. The next time the world sees him it will be too late – the world will be over. God's plan for all nations to know their Savior is through the witness of those disciples. Repentance and forgiveness has to be preached to all nations. The plan is proclamation. The disciples are long dead. But proclamation is still the plan. For two thousand years, God's plan has been going forward. The gospel moved out of Jerusalem and went through the entire Mediterranean world during the lifetime of the apostles. By AD 300, it had moved throughout the Roman world and beyond. In time, it covered Europe. It reached America and Africa and Asia. It is has gone out to every nation under heaven.

In every part of the world, the gospel reaches new people every day by preaching and teaching, by sharing and proclaiming. That's how God does this work. We have a share in the work God is doing. He provided witnesses, men who could attest that Christ really rose. Through them he wrote and collected the New Testament. And then God entrusted that word to us. God calls our congregation to be good stewards of that life-giving word. We're supposed to reach out into our community and the world with the gospel. We're supposed to teach our children to know their Savior. We are supposed to train every member of our congregation so that they grow in faith and live for Christ. Every one of us is a part of that work.

So how are we doing? Are we faithful to God's plan? Do we want people to hear the good news? Are we willing to bring an offering so they can? Are we willing to dedicate out time and energy to making sure that we personally hear and grow in our knowledge of Christ and in our faith in him? Are we willing to be here, to give here, to participate here so that our children and our adults grow in their faith?

If those questions make you uncomfortable, maybe there's a reason for that. We have almost 600 members here at Peace. Yet, we average just over 200 in church on Sundays and just under one hundred in a Bible class and Sunday school. How many of us are willing to serve on the board of elders or the board of stewardship and outreach or the board of education, the organizations charged with making sure preaching and teaching and outreach happen here? How many of us take the time to volunteer in any way here at church? How many of us to invite friends or coworkers to come and learn about their Savior?

Do you have a reason to feel guilty about your participation and your support of God's plan to share the gospel with the whole world? If the answer is yes, then recognize your sin for what is: something that condemns you to hell. That's the first step of repentance. But, then, my friends, understand what it means that Jesus really did rise. It means that your sin is paid for. It means that God has wiped all that sin away. God loves you as his own dear child. Trust in his forgiveness. And my friends, commit yourselves to a new and holy life. Be faithful in hearing the gospel. And join in our efforts. Not everyone can serve on a board, not everyone can knock on doors, but we all can serve the Lord and support his plan of preaching and teaching the gospel. We do all that we do because it's all true. He really did rise. For you. Amen.