

April 26, 2009 Luke 24:36-49 "Peace & Proclamation" by Richard Boatman

³⁶ And as they were saying these things, He Himself stood among them. He said to them, "**Peace to you!**" ³⁷ But they were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ "Why are you troubled?" He asked them. "And why do doubts arise in your hearts?" ³⁹ Look at My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself! Touch Me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." ⁴⁰ Having said this, He showed them His hands and feet. ⁴¹ But while they still could not believe because of [their] joy and were amazed, He asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, ⁴³ and He took it and ate in their presence. ⁴⁴ Then He told 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." ⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He also said to them, "This is what is written: the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and **repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name** to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And look, I am sending you what My Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high."

"Peace," was and is a common greeting amongst Jews. But like the 23rd Psalm, familiarity sometimes robs us of powerful revelation. "Peace to you!" in this instance was no mere pleasantry. It was an announcement of reconciliation, harmony and wholeness. For standing before these startled disciples was the very personification of Peace: Jesus the resurrected Christ.

The resurrection of bodies was hardly a new idea. Upon arriving at the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus said to Martha, "Your brother will rise again." Martha had no trouble in accepting this and replied, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." What was revolutionary in Jesus wasn't the idea of resurrection but that it would happen to someone before the final judgment. Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life..." Then he proceeded to raise Lazarus from the dead.

And now Jesus in his resurrected body stands before his dismayed disciples, his glorious manifestation validating his Messianic claims and authority. "Peace to you!" he says. What a scene, a living drama that completely changed and raised the expectations of the disciples—and continues to **raise our expectations** today. Certainly it raises our expectations or our understanding regarding God's work of peace in our personal lives. Regardless how messed up we've become, how spiritually crippled we are, God can bring healing and restoration to our souls. In

the delightful family classic *Princess Bride*, the hero has been killed. His two friends carry him to the local wizard played by Billy Crystal. The wizard lifts up one of the hero's limp arms and lets it fall heavily back down. Then the wizard says, "I've seen worse." I've seen worse?! Worse than dead?! Isn't it wonderful to know that when our lives are messed up, when we feel like nothing can restore us, God's seen worse! Jesus looked into the jaws of hell, sin and perversity for us...oh, beloved, he's seen worse. He defeated death, hell and the grave. Nothing is beyond his reach in bringing reconciliation and wholeness into our lives.

But it doesn't stop there. "Peace to you!" raises our expectations as to God's work of peace—reconciliation, harmony and wholeness—not only *in* our lives but *through* our lives as a ministry of the *new* creation to the *entire* creation. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel thought that everything centered on God's ministry *to* them. But the New Testament framed it in a new light—everything centered on God's ministry *through* Israel to the nations. In a narcissistic age even the modern Church can digress in thinking that everything is centered on God's ministry *to* the Church ("*Me and Jesus/ got our own thing going...*"), when in reality it centers on God's ministry *through* the Church to all of humankind and, indeed, all of creation.

Listen to Romans 8:18-21: *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.* Remarkable.

Jesus' announcement of peace is not just for personal assurance and comfort; it is an announcement of God's mission of renewing and joining together the realms of heaven and earth again. Jesus in his new spiritual/physicality is the "mediator between God and humankind," the "firstborn among many brothers and sisters" who are being "conformed to the image [or likeness] of God's son" (Rom. 8:29).

Now why is this important? It is important because we are called to "**proclaim in his name**" God's salvation, God's mission in Christ through "**repentance for forgiveness of sins**" (Luke 24:47). Repentance is the *method* by which we turn towards God's *salvation*. So understanding salvation is essential to living out God's mission in Christ.

For modern Western Christians, salvation has come to mean "going to heaven when I die." (The old comedian said, "Everybody wanna go to heaven, but nobody

wanna die.”) And for much of evangelical Western Christianity, the ticket to guarantee this divine induction into the celestial city is found in the phrase “accept Jesus” or “believe in Jesus.” With this as the premise, God’s mission becomes getting people to *accept* Jesus, to *believe* in him so they go to heaven and not to hell. The problem with “believe in Jesus” lies in the shifting connotation of the word “believe” which has come to mean “mentally assent to.” We can nod in belief at the Apostles’ Creed and then deceive, worship idols of modern life, slander and rebel against God’s will and never sense the contradiction. When Jesus used the word “believe,” it was always in a context of action, i.e. follow me, obey me, etc. This modern disconnect between what we profess and what we practice is in large part due to our misunderstanding of salvation.

I don’t think salvation simply means we “go to heaven.” I believe salvation means heaven has come to us. So I don’t think our emphasis is upon getting people to say the “right” words to be saved, but rather turning to the right realm in which to live. The door to this realm is Jesus. Confessing him as Lord and Savior is indeed important, but only as it is combined with an understanding of what we have turned *from* and what we have entered *into*. When Paul said in Romans 10:9, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” it was in an ethos where such a confession was a direct confrontation to Roman society. There was but one Lord in the Greco/Roman world and that was Caesar. To confess Jesus as Lord was an intentional turning from the world’s system and a deliberate entering into the kingdom realm of God as the basis for living.

Without this connection between our confession of Jesus and our conscious entrance into the new realm of God’s kingdom as the rubric for our lives, getting people to simply say, “I accept” or “I believe in Jesus” is as meaningless as getting them to say, “I’m a toadstool” or “I’m a lemon drop.” Salvation means we have been rescued from the corruption and distortion of being dehumanized (made less than human), of living distorted lives, disconnected from the image of God.

Repentance, then, is turning from this dehumanizing and distorted way of living towards God’s restorative power in Jesus Christ, the first born new creation. So hear this: God’s mission to the whole creation, *through* the Church, is complete restoration, a rejoining of heaven and earth in a new spiritual/physicality of which Jesus’ resurrected body was the “first-born” of many to come.

Nearly a year ago, I quoted Bishop of Durham N.T. Wright in this regards. It now bears repetition: “...the risen body of Jesus is the first (and so far only) object

which is fully at home in both [heaven and earth] and hence in either, anticipating the time when everything will be renewed and joined together.”

Learning to be “fully at home in heaven and earth” is the context for these last verses: ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And look, I am sending you what My **Father promised**. As for you, stay in the city until you are **empowered** from on high.”

The empowering of the Holy Spirit is about our being filled with God’s Presence, his realm, learning to be “fully at home in heaven and earth.” And our Lord’s words help us see that this doesn’t happen just through information *about* Jesus. It only happens through formation *by* him. The disciples were now informed; they knew beyond doubt that Jesus was alive. But as excited as they were, the information alone was not enough. They needed the Spirit’s formation in their hearts and lives; they needed to be empowered by God’s presence.

I wonder if that’s where many folks live, truly believing that Jesus is alive, exposed to all kinds of information about him, but never really empowered by him. Perhaps we’ve talked too much about giving our lives to Jesus and too little about Jesus giving his life to us. He comes to us by the Spirit, wires our home, fills us with his “current,” unpacks his bags and sets up housekeeping. That’s formation.

Author Max Lucado told a story about a wealthy but frugal woman who lived on the seashore in a small home in Ireland at the turn of the last century. Because of her thrifty nature, the locals were surprised when she became one of the first to have electricity in her home. Weeks after the installation, the meter reader came to see her. He wanted to make sure everything was working okay as scarcely any usage appeared. The meter man asked, “Are you using your power?” “Certainly,” the woman answered. “Each evening when the sun sets, I turn on my lights just long enough to light my candles; then I turn them off.”

How do you and I answer the question, “Are you using your power?” Like this woman, are we connected to the “electricity” of Christ but not being altered by it? Do we occasionally flip the switch of spirituality, but for the most part live in the dark? I can still hear my dad saying when one of us boys would leave a light on or hold the refrigerator door open: “You can tell who pays the light bill around here.” I’ve got good news. Jesus has paid the light bill in advance. Turn on the switch and leave it on! Be empowered by Jesus to be healed and to bring his healing power to those around you. Turn from distorted ways and turn to the divine power of God. Like Motel 6, he’ll “keep the light on for you.”