

**“Right Here, Right Now”**  
**Luke 24:36-53; Psalm 93**

October 1, 1932. Third game of the World Series. The Yankees had won the first two games in New York. With the series moving to Chicago, the animosity between New York and the Chicago Cubs had embraced the Cub fans. Motorcycle policeman cleared the way for the arriving Yankees to get to their hotel; where upon their arrival Babe Ruth and his wife were spat on by a woman fan.

And the 50,000 who jammed Wrigley Field the next day were no kinder. Even the presence of presidential hopeful, Franklin D. Roosevelt could not dissuade the mob from hurling names and lemons at Babe Ruth. Ruth was the primary target not only because he was the most famous baseball player of all time, but also because he loved to stir the pot. After hitting nine balls into the stands during batting practice, he yelled at the Cub players, “I’d play for half my salary if I could hit in this dump all the time.”

When Ruth came to bat in the first inning, Andy Lotshaw, the Cubs’ trainer, referring to Ruth’s ample waistline, jabbed, “If I had you, I’d hitch you to a wagon . . .” Ruth promptly smacked a three run homer.

When the Yankees batted in the fifth inning, the score was tied 4-4, and the rowdiness had reached a crescendo. The crowd’s boos and hoots were matched only by the Cub players’ taunts hurled with cupped hands from the top of the dugout steps. As Ruth approached the plate, he replied to the Cub verbiage with a distasteful choke sign. Cub pitcher Charlie Root threw a called strike. The crowd roared. Two pitched balls brought an intermission in the razzing. But a second called strike revved the spectators and players to full throttle.

It was then that one of the most famous moments in baseball history occurred. Though still disputed today, legend has it that Babe Ruth with a sweep of his huge, left arm pointed to the centerfield fence, indicating where he would hit the next pitch. Root let fly with a curve, low and away. With his trademark sweeping swing Ruth clobbered the ball, knocking it straight toward the area where his finger had pointed. When it came down, it was the longest home run ever hit in Wrigley Field.

As he rounded third base, Ruth bowed deeply to the Cub bench. He had a right to do so. He had called his shot, and then backed it up.

Now in our passage this morning, Jesus calls his shot, and then backs it up. It is Easter, resurrection Sunday. His disciples are hiding in a room listening to the Emmaus Road travelers say they have seen the risen Christ. All of a sudden, Jesus is standing before them. They think He is a ghost.

To prove who He is, Jesus calls his shot. “Have you anything here to eat?” he asks. They give him a piece of fish. Right before them he eats it, and they know He is the risen Christ.

Days later, this band of frightened, timid disciples goes on a preaching spree that changes the history of the world. How did they do it? Where did these Galilean nobodies find the power to call their shot? This morning, we will look at three elements that gave those disciples the energy to overcome death and darkness, and ask if those elements can give the same power to each one of us.

It is hard for us to read the scriptures the way they were written. We handle them like a father holding his newborn child. We are afraid that if not held oh so delicately, the Bible may break, its truth shattering before our very eyes. But as every new father quickly discovers, babies are far more resilient than we thought. They are to be held, hugged, kissed, caressed, enjoyed. It is only then we understand them and they become a part of our lives.

Now, scripture must be treated in the same manner. It is to be handled, contemplated, questioned, searched. The Biblical stories were written for us to place ourselves in them. Too often, we shrug them off as irrelevant: “Nothing like that ever happened to me.” Or, else, we view them like some holy object that is to be worshipped instead of used. They are like the family’s heirloom of silver knives, forks, and spoons. We talk about them, even pull them out every year or two and polish them — but we never eat with them.

And stories like this one about the appearance of the resurrected Christ especially fall into this category. We read this narrative and piously nod our belief in it. But if we were honest we would admit it sounds more like a science fiction movie. Yet, if we take the pious wrap off the Bible and place ourselves in the story, we find people in our situation.

These disciples were in the depths of despair. They could see no way out. They had spent three years of their lives following this man who was all of a sudden gone. Think about it. He had changed nothing. The Romans still ruled with an iron fist. Judaism went on just as before. No great revolution had been inaugurated. Politically, socially, religiously, everything was the same.

People like Peter, James, and John had left their families, missed all those little league games, piano recitals, and high school graduations to follow this supposed Messiah around the country. How happy do you think their wives were with them? They had abandoned their jobs, their careers. Plus, they had to deal with the death of their friend, a death that came about when all of them abandoned Him. Otherwise, they were struggling with the same problems that affect every one of us — death, strained family relationships, guilt, financial disappointments, and a loss of direction and meaning.

A man goes into a drugstore and asks the pharmacist if he can give him something for hiccups. The pharmacist promptly reaches out and slaps the man’s face. “What did you do that for?!” the man exclaims.

“Well, you don’t have the hiccups anymore, do you?” answers the pharmacist.

“No,” the man says, “but my wife out in the car still does!”

Sometimes, we feel like we have experienced life's pain, and still been granted no cure.

Now, how did those disciples move from the defeat and despair of that moment to ignite the greatest force for good in the history of the world? On Pentecost, they will receive the Holy Spirit. But before that, notice what happens here.

First, Jesus Christ becomes a physical, tangible part of their lives. I don't have a clue how he came through walls, what his resurrected body looked like, why he still had crucifixion marks, or how in the world he ate fish. And, apparently, neither did the disciples. Look at verse forty-one. He appears out of thin air, tells them to touch him, shows them his pierced hands and feet, and the verse says, "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering..." They were sure someone had put a little something extra into the wine at lunch. They couldn't grasp it. They couldn't believe their eyes. And yet, there stood the resurrected Christ.

There is so much we do not grasp, cannot understand in the world, the Bible, our lives. And yet, the faith teaches us that Jesus Christ loves us. He is neither a ghost, nor a genie we summon at will by rubbing the Bible. He is a presence in our lives, right here, right now, and if we allow him, He will guide and help us. The first step out of despair and darkness is believing God is here with us.

A four-year-old boy was asked to return thanks before New Year's dinner. The family members bowed their heads in expectation. He began his prayer, thanking God for all his friends, naming them one by one. Then he thanked God for Mommy, Daddy, brother, sister, Grandma, Grandpa and all his aunts and uncles. Then he began to thank God for the food. He gave thanks for the turkey, the dressing, the fruit salad, the cranberry sauce, the pies, the cakes, even the whipped creme. Then he paused, and everyone waited and waited. After a long silence, the young fellow looked up at his mother and asked, "If I thank God for the broccoli, won't God know that I'm lying?"

For Christians, our first step is truly believing God is here and listening to us.

When we see Jesus as a real presence in our lives, darkness and despair are overcome through study of the Bible. Americans have become a scripturally illiterate people. Literature no longer contains scriptural allusions because so few people grasp them. The first thing Jesus did after showing the disciples his resurrected body was to help them understand the Bible.

Our culture has made Jesus a white American with middle class values. Now, he is one of us. No wonder we don't believe he has the power to lift us from our darkness and despair. Because if he is just one of us, how can He help us do what we can't do for ourselves?

Knowing the Bible has nothing to do with memorizing verses. True study of the scriptures will enable us to understand the major themes of the Bible. We begin to discern what an incredibly radical book this is. When Jesus opened the scriptures, the disciples then understood who He was, and that to which He called them. We can only understand our lives, discern their meaning, purpose, and direction from this book. But it is not easy. And it is not accomplished by accepting some glib set of rules that mirror middle class America. The God of the Bible is a radically loving, honest, demanding, caring being who calls every one of his creatures to be just like him. But we can only establish a relationship with God when we understand God's word contained in this book.

Harold Cole, from Johnson City, Tennessee, sent a story into the magazine Budget Travel where he told about he and his wife attending an open air market in Mexico. The market had a greeter, much like an American Walmart. The greeter smiled and welcomed them in Spanish. Using his best high school Spanish, Cole responded and asked, "What time do you close?"

Well, the greeter's smile vanished, he stepped back slowly, and ran away. While Cole and his wife tried to figure out what went wrong, the greeter returned with a machine gun toting policeman, who asked him in English, "What is your problem, señor?"

Cole told him he had asked what time the market closed and repeated what he had said in Spanish. The policeman laughed and said, "You did not say, 'What time do you close?' You asked, 'What time do you want to die?'" Cole said that needless to say, he stuck with English from that point on.

If we do not understand the Bible, we will not comprehend and will often get wrong what God is saying to us.

Accepting Jesus as a real presence, we study the scriptures, which alert us that only repentance and forgiveness provide the ability to crush the fear and selfishness that infects us. Jesus tells the disciples repentance and forgiveness of sin are to be proclaimed in his name to all nations.

What sinks us deeper into the pit of darkness? A refusal to admit we are wrong. It is so hard for us to confess our faults. And that unwillingness to acknowledge our sin, our desire to always blame someone else, pushes us further into despair. Attempting to justify ourselves blinds us to the sin controlling us.

Yet, through repentance, forgiveness takes place. And only forgiveness can free us to begin again. Our belief in God's forgiveness enables us to cast off the actions and guilt weighing us down. Jesus knew God's forgiveness would provide people with the ability to radically change their lives. Without forgiveness of ourselves and others, the guilt, sin, and evil that so latches onto us will become permanent fixtures invading and destroying every aspect of our existences.

The story is told that while Leonardo da Vinci was working on his painting "The Last Supper," he became angry with a certain man. Losing his temper, he lashed out at the fellow with bitter words. Returning to his canvas, Leonardo

attempted to work on the face of Jesus but was so upset he could not steady himself for the painstaking work. Finally, he put down his tools and sought out the subject of his wrath and asked his forgiveness. The man accepted his apology and Leonardo was able to return to his workshop and finish painting the face of Christ.

One who disregards Christ's offer of repentance and forgiveness will discover a weakening and rending of the very fabric that knits us together spiritually, mentally and physically.

“Right Here, Right Now”

On that Resurrection Sunday, the disciples thought Jesus was a ghost. And that is exactly how he looks to many of us. He appears as an extraterrestrial being to be acknowledged, given verbal assent, but producing no real affect on our lives. But when we accept that Christ is a real presence, right here, right now, that God does work in the world, and when we study the scriptures, repent, and believe in Jesus' power to forgive us, we can radically change who we are.

This morning, like those disciples on that first Easter, let us move from seeing Jesus as an apparition, to viewing him as the One who will enable us to defeat our darkness and despair, moving us forward with confidence and hope — right here, right now.

Ludwig L. Weaver, Jr.  
Westminster Presbyterian Church  
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