

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.

The text is Luke the twenty-fourth chapter beginning at the forty-fourth verse

Then he said to 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 and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.

In the beginning... That's when this all started. It had seemed like a slow plodding pace since the beginning of time. Even 33 years ago on a quiet night in Bethlehem, it wouldn't have seemed all that much out of the ordinary. A child is born. I wonder if Mary thought about Gabriel's visit between contractions. She must certainly have remembered when the shepherds arrived. Then things were quiet again for about 30 years.

That quiet was deceptive. The whole world had been simmering since the very beginning of time, since Adam chose the path of disobedience. Nature itself had been longing for release from sin and the curse of death, even as sin seem to have the upper hand getting worse and worse day by day. But God was there. Even from the day of Adams disobedience the course was set for your salvation.

Oh things happened—lots of things. Things that seem to amplify the problem of sin in the world. But as scripture records them it also has a thread, a promise of things to come. Then it all came together. Three years like a whirlwind and then three days that changed everything.

All of scripture had been pointing to these days, explaining who Jesus is, taking us to the Cross. Now in this text, we are here. Jesus had died, in intense suffering that would have been bad enough just in its plain physical brutality, but our Savior, who was without sin, became sin so that we might be made righteous. But death could not hold Him. Christ is risen!

In Luke, just before today's reading, Jesus is with the disciples on the day of His resurrection. The reading ends forty days later. The glimpse of what happened in those forty days goes like this, ***"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 and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures"***.

Can you imagine? Rather like four years in seminary, or even eight years all in forty days.

Of course these men had seen Jesus at work over about three years. They surely had spent many hours in the synagogue over the years. But God's ways are not our ways. So, it could not have been easy to take in new ideas.

I shouldn't have said it like that. We can and do consume ideas, good and bad, like cheap candy. But there is more to what we have in Jesus. No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no heart has imagined how much God loves us or what He has prepared for us. The disciples had not understood what was happening before their eyes, but now, in these forty days after the resurrection, **He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures**—all of Scripture, because the faith we have is not just a good idea, not even a collection of good ideas. It is the real, tangible gift of our Kinsman Redeemer to rescue us from sin and death.

And it is not just for us here within these four walls, it is for this town, this corner of our world. Remember what the angels told the shepherds at Jesus' birth—that they were bringing **good news of great joy that will be for all the people**. Jesus gives us the short version here of what all of Scripture declares—**“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things”**.

And He didn't say that we should be witnesses, or that we could be witnesses with more training, but rather that we are witnesses. We are His hands and voice in Troy, New Hampshire. Maybe we could do more, maybe we will do more, but for the moment rest in this—we are God's children. We are God's children in a time of turmoil and uncertainty, and in all of that we can rest in Him, turn to Him for forgiveness of our sins, trust Him with our lives in this world and the next, and praise Him, and wrapped in His love, we can love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

I have found great joy in today's text. It covers a lot ground. Jesus opened up the Scriptures for them and for us. He explained what all of Scripture proclaimed and explained—that He came to us in the flesh, that He came to us to suffer and die, that He came to us that we might repent and find forgiveness in Him, that He came to us to crush death under His feet and rise out of the grave, that He came to us that through His death and resurrection He could take us through our own death and into His resurrection.

And if that wasn't enough, He sent the promise of the Father to us who believe that we would have the power to proclaim His glory, the confidence to walk, not in the ways of the world, but in His ways; the strength to be obedient even in the face of suffering, persecution, and even, yes even inconvenience.

And then He left them.

At first glance that might seem disappointing, even traumatic. They had seen God in the flesh, heard His voice. They loved Him. They worshipped Him. Now He was ascending to the Father and their joy was almost palpable. The joy that filled them sprang from the knowledge what His departure meant—that it meant He would be with them always, not constrained by time and space as He was when He was walking with them, but with them always just as He had intended from the beginning into all eternity.

The past couple of months had been a whirlwind, but now they knew, as we do, that sin and death had been destroyed; and they knew, just as we do, that we can follow Jesus to the cross, to the grave, and to the skies.

Christ is risen!

Amen

NOW MAY THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING,
KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS IN TO
LIFE EVERLASTING.
