

## ***THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER***

***Luke 24:36-49***

The room was dark. We are told that the doors and shutters were closed. The air in that room was probably stale because of lack of good ventilation. Everyone was quiet; speaking only in hushed whispers. The disciples were gathered there for fear of the Jews. The Jewish authorities had killed Jesus just three days before. They had crucified Jesus their leader; the Messiah of God. What would they do to them. So they kept quiet so that no one would find them.

The pressure was taking its toll on the mental state of the disciples. That morning some of the women snapped, and started babbling about Jesus being alive. The realization that someone had gone as far as to steal his body had pushed them over the edge. The air was so thick with tension that Thomas decided to just leave for a while. Then someone knocked on the door.

Everyone held their breath for fear that it was the Romans come to arrest them. To their relief it was just two of Jesus followers who had left town that morning. They too had gone off the deep end, and were babbling about seeing Jesus. Then the door was quickly shut and bolted again, and they talked about it in hushed whispers.

Suddenly, there was light in the dark room. The light wasn't coming through the shutters, or the doors, they were still bolted shut. It was from the middle of the room. It was coming from Jesus who was standing in the middle of the room; alive! He opened his arms and said, "Peace be with you!" They were

startled and terrified. Perhaps they had lost their minds. Or maybe it was Jesus' ghost come to haunt them for betraying him. Then Jesus spoke: "Why are you frightened? Why do you doubt what you have heard? I am alive just as the scriptures told you. Look touch my hand and side. I am flesh and bone. I am not a ghost!"

But even as they looked at His hands and feet, they had trouble believing. Then Jesus said, "I'm hungry. Do you have anything to eat around here?" They gave Him some fish, and watched in amazement as He ate.

Then Jesus began to teach them again. He said, "I've already told you this, but I'm going to tell you again. Everything that the Bible says will happen, must happen." Then He opened their minds to see how the scriptures were being fulfilled. And He showed them that it was written that He should die on a cross and rise on the third day.

Jesus then said something that probably worried, or even scared the disciples at first. He said, "It's God's will that everyone hear about repentance and forgiveness in my name. Begin in Jerusalem and tell it to all the world. It's your job to be my witnesses. It's your job to let them know that they can have new life through me!" Can just imagine that someone laughed out loud, "Ha ha ha. That Jesus is such a kidder. He doesn't really expect us to go out and start telling people about repentance and forgiveness in His name. If we go out there openly talking about following Jesus, they'll kill us! 'Go witness!' That's easy for Him to say. He's already been crucified, but I haven't, and I don't plan to be."

But Jesus continued. Remember when the prophets promised that God would pour out the spirit on all flesh. Well, that's about to happen. Just stay here in the city until you have been filled

with power from above.

These first Christians faced incredible odds. The Roman Empire was strong and several times they tried to stamp out this new religion. But power came from above, and they told people about the truth of repentance and forgiveness in Jesus name.

And the church moved out of that stale dark upper room. At Pentecost they opened the doors and let some fresh air in. And they openly came out into the light to reveal the Good News, the Gospel.

Unfortunately, it appears as if the church today has retreated back to that Upper Room, mentality at least, and maybe spiritually as well. We no longer bolt the doors and shutter the windows. Instead we hide behind carved doors and stain glass windows. Maybe we need to open the doors and windows, and let some fresh air in. But people are afraid to let in some fresh air. They are afraid that those outside will find out that they are followers of Christ. They are afraid to go out there to face the ugliness of the world, and tell it about salvation, in Jesus' name.

So we hide in our Sunday Upper Rooms and keep quiet for fear that the neighbors will hear us.

Jesus told us to be witnesses, to boldly go where no disciple has gone before, and tell people of love and grace through Jesus Christ. But we haven't been doing that, because if we had, more people would know about it, and our pews would be full every Sunday. Has anyone of us ever sat down and told someone about Jesus? Has anyone of us told them that Jesus died for their sins, and if they would accept Him, they would have eternal life? Has anyone here taken the risk to love an outcast because God first loved that person?

There is a poster that made the rounds a while back which asked the question, "If being a Christian were a crime, would there be

enough evidence to convict us?" Maybe we would have trouble getting an indictment on most "Christians". We might not even have enough evidence to get a search warrant. Would our friends, neighbors, and co-workers say we are a Christian, or would they say, "I think they go to church, but I don't know for sure?"

To bear witness we must be willing to let people see our religion, our faith, at work. We might be afraid to let people know we are a Christian because they might think we are a fanatic. They might not associate with us. If we showed God's love to the wrong people, or spoke out against the wrong thing, they might not like us any more.

If we are afraid, we are not alone. Jesus' first witnesses were afraid too, but God gave them the strength to face their fears and God will give us the strength necessary to be his witnesses, in our time, in our world. We have already been given that power. Simply Believe!

**AMEN.**