

Easter Sunday
The Awesome, Liberating Power of the Lord's Love

A family talk in 2 parts by Rev. Michael Gladish
Mitchellville, MD, April 1, 2018

For this presentation a 6 foot x 30" table will be leaning against the altar horizontally, draped with a dark blue cloth to represent the tomb in the garden – which of course will be surrounded by floral offerings.

1st Lesson: *Luke 24:1-12*

The congregation being seated, Amy Odhner will begin a flute solo of hymn #991, Christ the Lord is Risen Today. At the end of one verse the reading will begin as Amy continues with the second verse. At the same time three women will approach the chancel from the back of the church, looking for the Lord's body.

As the reading continues and the women look "perplexed" with faces bowed, two men will approach the chancel from the sides *unnoticed by the women* and stand beside them. As the reading continues and the music fades, the actors will all depart (men to the sides and women down the center aisle). We may or may not have a "Peter" run up, have a look, and then go away pondering.

Now the pastor will give a short talk as follows
on the Bewilderment, Fear and Joy of this occasion

You know, sometimes before we can really understand something we have to go through a stage of being unclear or even totally confused about it. On the other hand, sometimes, we find that we have a very CLEAR idea about something that turns out later to have been completely wrong! Why is that?

Well, one reason is that we need to be reminded that we don't know everything. We need to be reminded that there's always more to learn and understand.

Another reason, related to this, is that we can never really understand something until our minds have been prepared to understand it. For example, babies don't really understand anything you tell them, and they certainly can't read. They have to learn what words mean before they can understand sentences, and they have to learn what letters mean before they can read. (Of course they know whether we're angry or happy, but that's not the same as understanding.) In any case there's nothing quite like the joy and excitement we feel when we learn something for the first time, especially when the thing we're learning is much, much better than we thought it was.

This was exactly what the women in our story, and all the disciples experienced when they came to the tomb where the Lord had been buried and couldn't find His body – and then learned that He was NOT dead after all, but was alive again and going to meet them. Just imagine! They had thought that the Lord was going to save them from the Romans *and* from their own selfish leaders who had made their lives in the world so difficult. **Then** they had seen with their own eyes how He was killed in a most cruel way and buried in a cave. It certainly seemed as if all their hopes were dashed, and all their excitement was turned to sorrow and grief.

But then...? Where was the body? And who were these two men in shining garments? This was NOT what they were expecting, and it certainly must have been very confusing. So... you know how YOU feel when you get confused, right? You get anxious, and sometimes really afraid because you have no idea what's going on, or what might happen next! Well, that's exactly what happened in our story, as you saw a few minutes ago.

Of course, as you know, the Lord was NOT dead but had risen and would visit all of them later that same day. In fact, He had told them MANY TIMES that this is what would happen, but until then they just didn't get it; they couldn't understand it. And why didn't they get it? Why couldn't they understand it? THEY JUST WEREN'T READY. First of all their minds were too full of their own ideas to see what the Lord had really meant when He told them about His death and resurrection. They had to learn from experience that their own ideas about what He had taught them were wrong before they could learn better.

But even more importantly, they needed to be *prepared* to understand by hearing and seeing all that the Lord did, and storing all this in their memories even though they didn't understand it at the time *so that when the Lord did rise again he could remind them of all these things* and *then* very patiently show them what He had really meant.

It is exactly the same with us today. We need to learn as much as we can about the Lord and His Word, even if we don't really understand it, because later on, when we're ready, and when the Lord appears to us in His *spiritual* body, we will be able to appreciate Him in a new way, and all the things we learned about Him before will make perfect sense. Not only that, but we will be filled with a tremendous sense of wonder, joy and excitement as we realize how much He loves and cares for us, and how amazingly and powerfully He is still with us, even though we might have thought for a while that He was dead and gone – or didn't even exist. We'll say more about THAT in a few minutes.

Amen.
Hymn #833

Further Lessons: *Ezekiel* 34:11-16, 22, 28-31 and *Mark* 16:9-15
The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine #286 & 293

The Awesome, Liberating Power of the Lord's Love

This is how the Lord began His public ministry: when He was teaching in Galilee, He went to a synagogue as usual on a Sabbath day and stood up to take His turn reading. "And He was handed the book of the prophecy of Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed (and) to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord'" (Luke 4:18-19). Then He sat down. And the people watched Him... and waited.... "And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your ears.'"

So the Lord spoke of His purpose in becoming a man, taking on the Human form in this world. Every part of it speaks of His love and care for people and His work to help us all have happy, fulfilling lives. But how would He do this wonderful work? – Over and over in the Gospel of John He said that He would do it by teaching people the truth, so that they would know what to do in order to receive His love. For example He said, "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46). And again near the end of His life in the world He said, "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). It is the truth, He said, that makes us free (John 8:32), indeed free of the falsity and sadness and captivity of a misguided life; it is the truth that gives us the spiritual light to see *and so understand* how to live well.

Can anybody disagree with this? – or find anything wrong with what the Lord ever taught? Surely His Word *rightly understood* **is** the answer to all our problems.

Still, as you saw earlier, for a long time the Lord's disciples really *didn't* understand what He had taught them – especially what He had taught them about Himself. Maybe because He did so many wonderful miracles they thought His purpose was to solve all their worldly problems? So when He was killed and buried they didn't know **what** to think! And even now as we read the story of His resurrection we find that they were still perplexed, and couldn't believe that He had risen. In fact, even when they first saw Him again they were struck more with fear than with thankfulness. After all, they had *all* forsaken Him and run away when the Romans took Him to be crucified. What, then, must He think of them now?! What would YOU think, if all YOUR friends ran away and abandoned you when people started making fun of you and lying about you and *really badly* hurting you?

Well, surprise of all surprises! The Lord was NOT angry or upset. He had NO thoughts of getting even, or of making the disciples feel bad in ANY way. Remember, He had known all along that these things would happen, and now that they were over He knew very well that this was the best time ever to make His love and wisdom really clear to the disciples. And so that is exactly what He did.

He told them not to be afraid, spoke to them very gently, asked them questions, and gave them some simple instructions about what to do next. He was calm, patient, reassuring, and generous, even breaking bread with them and offering them fish that He had prepared for them to eat, clearly reminding them of the times He had done this with them before His crucifixion.

But of all the things that the Lord did when He rose from the grave can you guess which one was most important....? That's right, He *explained* all over again why His suffering had been necessary, and what it had accomplished. He opened the disciples' eyes not only to see HIM in His spiritual body but to see that He had fulfilled His purpose by facing and overcoming all the evils and falsities that people had thrown at Him, so that He actually had total power over them. In fact He proved that He had – and still has – power over ALL evil and falsity since He hadn't just corrected the chief priests and scribes and Pharisees, He had also cast out demons and put all the hells in their place. Finally, He had allowed cruel people to kill Him at least partly in order to show clearly that the death of the natural body is not the end; it is really only the beginning.

So, just imagine, once their fear and bewilderment left them, how joyful and excited the disciples were on Easter morning and in the days following when they saw the Lord again, and heard Him speak, and walked and ate with Him, and felt the power of His persistent love and care for them.

And again... just imagine, once OUR fear and bewilderment about the Lord leaves US, how joyful and excited WE can be every day of our lives, knowing that He is still with us, that He still loves and cares for us despite all our foolishness, doubt and misunderstanding, and that He still has that awesome power to overcome the evils and falsities that threaten OUR lives today.

Like the first disciples before the Lord appeared on Easter morning, there is a lot we don't understand about Him. There is a lot we may be doubtful about, causing us to be afraid even to believe He really still exists. But if we are willing to keep on listening and learning, if we really pay attention and think deeply, if we really CARE (as the women did when they came to the empty tomb), one day the Lord will appear to us also in His glorified Humanity and explain everything so that we can have complete confidence in Him and serve Him – without fear or regret.

Amen.