

This Sunday's texts:

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

1 Peter 1:17-25

Luke 24:13-35

**Jesus Reveals Himself**

**Pastor Jim Cords**

**April 23, 2023**

The Holy Gospel is from Luke, chapter 24:

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing Him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked Him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" "What things?" He asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified Him; but we had hoped that He was the One who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all of this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find His body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said He was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus." He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself. As they approach the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if He were going farther. But they urged him strongly, stay with us for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So He went in to stay with them. When He was at the table with them, He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, and He disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened

on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when He broke the bread.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

*[Before Pastor Jim started his sermon, he invited Atkelt Simon from Children's HopeChest up to discuss St Timothy's new partnership with Children's HopeChest at the Chapa CarePoint. To learn more of what was said, please read the 4/23/23's Children's HopeChest document found with the other sermons.]*

So last year in 2022, we did a Read-through-the-Bible program that we called “Hearing God's Voice.” One of the questions I got over and over again was how do you really know if you're hearing God's voice? I will tell you without a doubt the mission team that's been working feels like we have heard God's voice calling us into this ministry in Chapa.

In a similar way, it's interesting, on the road to Emmaus, these two disciples were walking. First off, one of them is completely anonymous. We don't even have that person's name and the other, Cleopas is certainly not among the Twelve. Yet as they're walking home from Jerusalem about seven miles, Jesus shows up to them. Of course, they don't recognize Him at first. But then He makes Himself known. He reveals Himself in the breaking of the bread. He also does another thing. He reveals to them the truth of who He is by expounding upon the Scriptures that foretold the Messiah would suffer and die.

In the breaking of the bread, they recognize Him. The first thing these two disciples do is they run back the seven miles to Jerusalem. They go to the Eleven that are gathered there, ready to announce in fact they have seen Jesus risen from the dead, bearing witness to the Resurrection to the disciples. Even before they can get it out of their mouths, they find out that Simon Peter has also seen the Risen Christ. So there are two witnesses to the Resurrection happening here. You can see a part of the power of the Resurrection is also being a witness of the truth and power of the Resurrection to others, including others within the gathering of the faithful.

We need the witness of each other to strengthen and encourage our faith, as well as the freedom and the calling that we would follow to be a witness to those who do not yet know the resurrection of Jesus in their own lives.

Listen to this word from Acts. “Be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord [master, “all authority”] and Messiah.”<sup>1</sup> That word

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:36

“Lord” is often interesting in our scriptures, especially in the Old Testament. When it’s all capitals, it really is *Yahweh*. It's the name of God. Whenever we see all those capitals, we shouldn't necessarily think “master.” We should think Yahweh, the personal God who's revealed Himself to us and makes Himself known. But in this case, in Acts, they're not just trying to name the personal name of God. They're telling us that Jesus was made known to us as Lord and Master of our lives, that Jesus is going to be our guide, that we are going to follow Him, submit to the Lordship of Christ. He is, in fact, the one anointed by God to have authority over the heaven and earth. In Matthew, it tells us “all authority has been given to Him”<sup>2</sup> and then He tells us “Go and make disciples.”<sup>3</sup> So we want to recognize right here in the first part of Acts, they recognize that the risen Christ is the One who has been put in authority and is Lord of all.

Listen to it a little bit later. “And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit [this empowering presence of the living God]. The promise is for you and for your children and for those who are far off.”<sup>4</sup> You see the reality of life in that day is not much different, in this sense, than the reality of life in our day. We feel distanced 10,000 miles. How can we possibly be friends with people 10,000 miles away? [a reference to Children’s HopeChest friends] Well, we're not just going to be friends. We're brothers and sisters in Christ, mutual witnesses of faith, to encourage one another. The distance in miles is overcome by the power of the Lord Jesus, who makes us all His own. So we reach out. We support. We encourage our brothers and sisters of Christ here at St Timothy's and literally throughout the world.

Listen to 1 Peter. “Since you call on a Father who judges each person impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.”<sup>5</sup> The power of the Resurrection is to say you are no longer citizens *here*. You are now citizens of Heaven. The power of the Resurrection is to change your identity now as children of the Living God. That's why this relationship as brothers and sisters in Christ rises to a whole new level because who you are has been changed, as God has changed His relationship with us. He's made us His friends and now we are brothers and sisters in Christ together.

Then there's this interesting word at the bottom. “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:18

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 28:19

<sup>4</sup> Acts 2:38b-39

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 1:17

empty way of life.”<sup>6</sup> The suggestion is that this resurrection power, this presence of the Holy Spirit changes our worldview. It changes how we see things. It changes how we value things and people. So with the transformation that faith brings into our lives, we begin to see things that look important, but, in fact, are not and we begin to see things that seem unimportant and realize they are important.

A beautiful moment last week in worship was when we heard in the announcement from Ruth that we're going to say to these children, these youth in Chapa. You matter to God and you matter to us. Even if you live in a world that says you're insignificant, you matter. You're my brother. You're my sister and we are together in the family of God.

Jesus reveals Himself to us. Again that question as we're reading through the scripture last year, how do I know? How do I recognize the voice of God in my life? Well, it comes first and foremost through God revealing Himself *in* the Scripture. We are called by God to be *in* His Word, so that we can hear His voice, recognize it, and become familiar with it, as we hear it in the Bible. Jesus began with Moses and all the prophets. He explained to them what was in the Scripture concerning Himself. It's not for us to philosophize about who God is or what God is like. It's for us to read the Scripture and ask the question what has God said about Himself. What can we know about Him and His values and what He cares about in the Word of God?

But that doesn't necessarily confirm a sense of calling in our own lives. A lot of us kind of wonder well how can I know when God is speaking. Pastor Jim, how did you know? Mission team, how do you know that this relationship with Chapa is something that God has called us to do?

So I want to tell you just a little bit quickly as an example of how God can confirm His word in us by what has happened here. It's [Pastor] Jonna's fault. Pastor Jonna is the one that really got this started. She got this started because of our relationship with Water Mission. Water Mission had, in its ministry, in its source with those whom it served, a deep relationship of community elevation. They were not simply a relief organization. They were a developmental organization in the places they served. St Timothy's sent ... a lot of money! you guys were amazingly generous. It was a great thing and the work that Water Mission did was great.

But one of the questions that was raised is can we be directly in relationship with those who are being served through these gifts? And the answer

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 1:18

was no. Water Mission did and that was fabulous, but there was an arm's length between the people who sent the funding and that relationship.

So Pastor Jonna set aside a team of people and they started two years ago to read this book *When Helping Hurts*. They were trying to move us in our understanding beyond relief for a day to elevation for a lifetime, teaching someone how to fish rather than giving them a fish. This is an incredible book and, believe me, your mission team struggled with this book. As they journeyed through, right in the middle of it, Pastor Jonna felt called to leave St Timothy's and she said here you go, Pastor Jim and she said, Ruth Hardin, you're now in charge of this book study group - go for it. So I joined Ruth and the team and we continued that study through the next half year.

In that process, we discovered that there was an organization that built itself on the principles of *When Helping Hurts*. That was Children's HopeChest. We thought maybe we should talk to them and see what they're really all about. So we got on a Zoom call – Covid Zoom calls, boy did we learn - and we learned about their principles which were right in line with everything we had been talking about and working on. We thought okay this could be good.

Then we realized that Children's HopeChest is at work in Ethiopia and the Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia is the only church with whom the NALC has a full communion relationship. In fact, they're also in relationship with LCMC. It's also, just as an aside, the fastest-growing church in the world. There was a church plant about two years ago and what we found out was that church plant has already planted eight more churches. The struggle is they're planning churches so fast they don't have enough pastors and a year ago, one of the things that happened was there was a flood and the seminary was destroyed. So even before we began *this* conversation, St Timothy sent a huge benevolence gift to rebuild the seminary in Ethiopia. It also just so happens that Marilyn's father, in his last call in Madagascar, opened a Radio Voice of the Gospel, which was sponsored by the Radio Voice of the Gospel in Addis Ababa [a city in Ethiopia] and had a connection there. It also just so happens that Marilyn's brother, when he did internship, did an internship in Ethiopia with Radio Voice of the Gospel. So we've had these connections, including even in the past four of the last five years, I've been in a close relationship working on the ministry board with a pastor who was born in Ethiopia. He was in Colorado, by the way, and he's now serving in Torrance, California and hearing the stories of how God is at work even in the United States through people of faith coming from Ethiopia, they're sending

missionaries to us. They're sending missionaries around the world, even in the midst of a really, really huge need in their own land.

So many, many elements combine together with this idea of this calling that matches a study that began years ago. Now, all of a sudden, there's a connection. It just so happens that the Chapa CarePoint is officed in the Lutheran Church Mekane Yesus in Chapa, where we're going to visit the first week of August and connect with our brothers and sisters Christ, coming alongside to encourage one another in faith and in life and belief in the power of the Resurrection that indeed is at work in our lives.

We can know and understand this through the Scripture, through the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and through the words and communication of God's people and the relationships that God calls us into. We can look at those and say, "Well Pastor, that's just a coincidence." I call it a God-incident. When the circumstances of our lives, when the conversations with our brothers and sisters in Christ, when the sermons in church and the word of God in the Bible study begin to align, I believe that's a confirmation of the nudging and voice of God that will allow us to say "Yes, Lord. What You call me to, I will do."

I was talking to one of our members. I hope Ruth isn't in the room. She might not like me to say this. I was talking to one of our members this week and we were talking about this launch. I'm saying, "How have you felt about the announcements that have been happening? What have you been feeling about that?" She didn't want to say. The first thing she did was say nothing. She just kind of looked away. I said, "No, I'm asking you because I really want to know." She said, "You know the truth is what God has been moving in me is a concern *here*. What about the homeless here? What about the people in need right here in our own community?" I said to her very clearly, "You know what? It's very possible that God is not calling you to connect as a partner with Chapa, but God is calling you to connect with the ministries we're already doing here in local Ministry." It's not an either/or. It's a both/and for us as a community of faith.

You need to sense what God is doing and moving in you, in Scripture, in conversation, and in prayer. When God asks you to do something, I just want you to understand something. When Jesus is the Lord, the master of our lives and He asks you to do something, do you know what the answer is? Yes, Lord.

So what is God moving you to do? How is the power of the Resurrection at work in your life? So when the Lord prompts you locally or globally to do something, your answer is "Yes, Lord. I am your servant. Give me the power to do whatever You call me to do, even if it's uncomfortable, even if I'm not sure how

it's going to work, even if I don't feel equipped. Lord, You will equip me as You have called me to serve You." All these connections are what work in my heart and mind to confirm the movement of God in our lives. In my experience, I used to say of myself "God has to sometimes just hit me upside the head with a 2x4." I said that because when I realized that God was actually calling me to do something, I was looking back and seeing all these times He had whispered and prompted that I had ignored. That's why I said, "He's just got a really smack me upside the head for me to get it." I'm just a little dense. But then I realized something. No, I haven't been dense. What I have been is set up. God has prepared my heart in the many previous conversations, so now as He moves with this voice, I can recognize, I can confirm that it is, in fact, Him calling me now to act and I can act with confidence as I surrender to the power and movement of God in my life.

I believe we are called as a community of faith to enter into this relationship. I believe we will be blessed as we will be a blessing. I look forward to our partnership in this way and for the updates of how God moves in and through our lives to make this a new reality in the history and movement of God through this amazing congregation. Resurrection power is at work. It will allow us to do things we can't even imagine. Thanks be to God. Amen.