

**The Greatest Comeback of All Time!**  
**Luke 24:36-53**  
**April 23, 2014 (The Source)**

Today's story is about a post resurrection appearance. In all the post resurrection stories, Jesus is not recognized right away. Mary didn't recognize him until he spoke her name. The two men on the road to Emmaus didn't recognize Jesus until he eat with them (even though he walked with them for hours). In our story, the disciples don't quite recognize him until Jesus shows them his hands and feet.

Something happens in the resurrection which makes Jesus new. However, he still has a body. You can touch him. You can eat with him. Yet, he can pass through walls and vanish in a flash. But he is real.

Everything is the same. And everything is different at the same time.

John writes in his letter (I John 1:1-4) – notice the sensory-related verbs repeated over and over again:

**PPT** "That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen* with our eyes, which we have *looked at* and our hands have *touched*—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have *seen* it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have *seen and heard*...We write this to make our joy complete."

Did you notice the sensory verbs? Heard. Seen. Looked at. Touched. Appeared. John is confirming what they all know is true. It's real. They heard it, saw it, touched it. And it turned the disciples from frightened, terrified, in hiding people to ones of joy, praise and worship. "And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple praising God" (verses 52-53).

So, today, just like the disciples worshiped together and blessed God in the temple after his ascension, we gather together for the same reason – because of the resurrection.

**PPT** When we gather to worship, we rehearse the story of Jesus' death and resurrection.

This is what I want you to take home with you today: when we gather to worship, we rehearse the story of Jesus' death and resurrection.

For example, in verse 46 Jesus says, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day."

A couple of years ago, we placed a large cross at the front of our worship space in the large sanctuary. By that cross, we rehearse Jesus' death and resurrection. We confess in the Apostle's creed, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and buried...On the third day he rose again."

In the Lord's Supper, we repeat over and over again, "On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and broke it...In the same manner, he took the cup...Jesus' blood shed for you." In these words, we are rehearsing the death and resurrection of Jesus.

I want you to think about the regular elements in our worship services. The various parts of our worship services show up in our scripture passage. Or, maybe what I should say is our scripture passage tells us how to worship.

**PPT** Our passage begins with Jesus appearing and saying (verse 36), "Peace be with you." Larry does this at the announcement time on Sundays. I had you do this today.

This statement was a greeting in Jesus' time. In the OT, peace was often associated with the presence of God. The peace of God and the presence of God are inseparable.

So when Jesus came to the "startled and terrified" disciples, God came among them and offered His peace. That same peace is offered to us. We gather each week and we bracket all we do with the gift of peace. We begin by extending the peace of Christ to each other . We end our worship with the blessing which often contains peace.

As we continue our worship, especially on Sundays, our praise turns to confession. **PPT** Jesus says in our passage (Verse 47) "and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations."

Sometimes people will question why we need confession in a worship service. It is because Jesus tells us to proclaim repentance and forgiveness to all. It is directly related to Jesus' suffering and resurrection. The cross reconciles us to God, therefore we have been given the ministry of reconciliation. By practicing confession almost every Sunday, we acknowledge our reconciliation to God and to one another. It is another way to extend and share the peace of Christ with each other.

In every worship service, we have a sermon or message. In our passage, Jesus says, **PPT** (Verse 45) "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures."

We take time in worship to listen to a sermon where the preacher seeks to connect the words to life. We ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate the scriptures to open our minds so we will understand scripture.

Sometimes the readings are heard for the first time, sometimes they are heard as comforting old familiar stories, and sometimes as words that unsettle and sometimes motivate. When the disciples heard Jesus explain the familiar old stories (the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms), everything became new because now they saw Jesus in those old stories, and they were strengthened.

When we hear the Words of God, we are strengthened for our week. We may be given hope to face an unknown future. We may hear words of healing, words of assurance in times of uncertainty. Perhaps the sermon is not meant to explain so much as it is to move in our hearts and minds and souls so that we may receive life.

**PPT** After worship, we have something to do: Verse 48 "You are witnesses of these things."

We bear witness to things that are important to us all the time. We bear witness to the great movies or television programs we've seen and want others to enjoy. We bear witness to the accomplishments (or failures) of our sports teams. We bear witness to the important events in our family and our lives. That is what Facebook does. We bear witness -- that is, tell someone about -- the things that matter to us all the time.

It's not really all that different when it comes to the faith. Bearing witness is simply telling others where we sense God at work, whether it is in our lives or in the world. We bear witness all the time; we're just not used to thinking about doing it in terms of our faith.

The disciples did not go around the Roman world setting up Jesus memorial societies or simply repeating his parables. Instead, they insisted that Jesus was alive. They bore witness to the Resurrection.

And the best part: we are sent out with the power of the Holy Spirit. "I am going to send to you what my Father has promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (verse 49).

**PPT Verse 50:** "When he led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them" We end our worship services with the blessing. The preacher offers to the congregation what Jesus demonstrated to his disciples.

Sometimes, when we gather to worship, it is not a very exciting. Sometimes nothing seems to happen. The songs aren't very good. The sermon didn't speak to us. Yet, we come because worship is a rehearsal of the resurrection. We come because is a reminder of what God has done for us, what God promises for today and assurances for tomorrow. We come because we know God is at work. God is showering us with love and grace and mercy and forgiveness and His peace. This is the place we know we can receive it.

One time, Sports Illustrated made a top ten list of the greatest comebacks of all time. It was a list that was broader than just sports.

Elvis Presley made the list as a result of a TV special in 1968 that revived his sagging career.

Muhammad Ali made the list for his comeback from a seven year forced exile from boxing to once again become the undisputed heavy weight champion of the world.

Harry Truman was listed because of his 1948 victory over Thomas Dewey when all of the polls had shown him trailing significantly.

Michael Jordan made the list because of when he went from baseball back to basketball and won another three championships.

Humanity itself made the top ten list for its comeback from the Black Plague which killed 25 million Europeans in the 14th century.

Number two among the all-time comebacks was a tie between Germany and Japan for coming back from being devastated by World War II to become economic powers within only a generation.

And the number one greatest comeback of all time according to the editors of Sports Illustrated – Jesus Christ, A.D. 33.

And that is why we are here – to celebrate and rehearse the greatest comeback of all time – the Resurrection.

