

Indeed, we are here to praise the name of Jesus. And it is particularly our gathering together by God's design that he intends to be a message to the world that he is alive, that he reigns, and that he is the Savior.

This morning, on the second Sunday that we are focusing on our mission work and purpose here at CPC in this theme, *The Call to Witness*, I wanted to preach from the final portion of the gospel of Luke 24:36ff. And this will not only serve as a basis for what we are called to do as witnesses, but also as preparation as next week we will begin a series in the book of Acts. And that will carry us through the spring. But what I want to give you this morning is this thought to be thinking about: That Jesus intends, and we see in this passage, that every single person who proclaims Christ, who is a Christian, is called to witness. But what kind of witness are we to be? What does it mean to witness? We have that here for us. But the good news is, it is for every single Christian. The question is what do we think it is? And I think the answer may surprise you.

So let's look together as we see this passage, Luke 24:36-53. Hear now God's Word.

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see. A ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they were still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

This is the word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me. Our heavenly Father, we thank you that you have given to us your living Word, which gives us the promise that you have sent forth your Holy Spirit and poured it out on your church on those who belong to you. So Lord, we come to you in the name and authority of Christ, on the foundation of the promises of your Word, that you would again send forth your Holy Spirit afresh, that you would open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts that we might see wondrous things in your Word, that you would make us a people who are witnesses to the glory of the resurrected Christ. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

So this morning what we're going to do is we're going to see in this passage three things which you find in your outline. This morning we see that Jesus gives them The Appearance, The Promise, and The Commission. The Appearance, The Promise, and The Commission.

This arises out of a rather interesting story which precedes this passage. Jesus has already appeared. His identity was cloaked to those that he was walking with on the road to Emmaus. And indeed, as he's walking along he does this in verse 25. This is just prior to the text that we read this

morning. If you have your Bibles, you can certainly turn there. If you have them on your device, please turn them on. He says to them, he says, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ 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. And as they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted 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, and broke it, and began to give it to them.”

Is that sounding really familiar to what happened on the night in which he was betrayed? Hold that in your minds. Verse 31: “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 while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’ And then they ran quickly and they told of what Jesus had just accomplished. And they could not believe it.

And I want you to know that the context out of which this appearance and this promise and this commission comes from is a dramatic context. The disciples were not holding up in a room together reflecting on the great victory. Their lives, as it were, seemed to be crumbling down around them. Remember, very recently they had witnessed the very thing that they would’ve thought an anathema. Jesus, the one who taught them, Jesus, the one who called them, who called them out of their careers, called them out of their families into this band of men, and then sending them out, seeing him do wonderful, miraculous things, says ‘I’m going to the cross.’ And then he dies on a Friday afternoon outside Jerusalem at the hands of the people they perceive to be their enemies. And they fled behind closed doors.

And then they hear someone say he’s alive. But it wasn’t like they took that information and just ran...just show me! No, they stayed in the room. And here we come into this appearance. And in this appearance Jesus does three things: He confirms his bodily resurrection, he speaks, and he eats. So let’s look at this quickly together. Verses 36-43.

He confirms his bodily resurrection. You see this because what he does. He says, “Why are you troubled,” (verse 38), ‘and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have.” Jesus comes in and he looks at them, and he recognizes that they are not exactly at rest and at peace, because his one [word] of blessing is *shalom*. He desires for them to have what the word ‘peace’ actually means from a biblical perspective. It is a deep, abiding, full person with full integrity, peace--- between one’s outward appearance, one’s inward belief, mind, and heart. He’s wishing on them well-being, because he recognizes that’s not exactly where they are.

And he appears and he says, ‘You see, I am flesh and bone. Touch my hands.’ This is so important, because there is no other explanation for why a small band of committed Jews followed this one who claimed to be the Son of God, God and Man, dying on the cross. Now they are in a room, the heat comes. There is no explanation for why they changed, except that this is a historic event. As Jews, they believed that there would be a Messiah, but not like this one. They believed, as Jews, in resurrection, but not in the middle of history---at the end of history. Now Jesus is appearing to them, and it is absolutely frightening and stunning and amazing all at the same time.

Luke, who writes this, was not an eyewitness. Luke is writing to Theophilus. And in the writing of it he sits down, as we know from the earlier part of Luke, to write down an orderly account. And he went and investigated, interviewed those who were eyewitnesses, and he sits down and he writes out this orderly report. But remember, it’s not just the gospel of Luke, it’s the gospel of Luke-Acts. We’re going

to Acts next. But both are a gospel. Both the written to Theophilus, if you will, of what the work of Christ is and the result, the consequences of the work of Christ, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus comes, praise be to God, in flesh and bone. Now this flesh and bone was like that which was his body prior to the crucifixion, yet it is also new. It is a spiritual body. Because clearly, while he can say simultaneously this is flesh and bone---he can actually eat, and he does speak, and he asks them to touch him---but at the same time, it is not a body that is confined or limited as our flesh and bone is now. His was a spiritual body that enabled him to go into a locked room without having to open the door. It enables him to come and go at will. We cannot wrap our brains around what is being portrayed here.

But know this, while we may not be able to wrap our brains around it, it is to me something that we are to wrap our hope around. Because there is something important for us to note: That the appearance isn't a magic trick of God. He is demonstrating two things in this bodily confirmation: He is exemplifying his power, he is exemplifying that he is a God who is victorious over sin and death, and he is a God who is a God of hope to give us a picture of what our resurrection will look like. I don't know about your body, but my body needs this. I see here something that is worthy of hope, and it is something marvelous, and it changed everything.

Now this bodily confirmation comes in and he does a couple of things. He speaks to them, of course. It's fairly straightforward. They still seem to be amazed, they're still trying to grasp it. We know that because we learn later in the passage he needs to open up their minds. So they're intellectually engaging with this speech, but still it's like...pfffffft....right?

But then he does something else. He eats. He eats with them. We cannot dismiss how important that eating is. One, it confirms he is of flesh and bone, because it tells us something about the nature of his internal organs. They can handle food. It's not like Jesus showed up all empty inside and it just magically took care of itself. It tells us something. It tells us something about our resurrection bodies. We're going to eat. We're going to celebrate. Go read Revelation---it's all there. But it is also something profoundly human and divine, that in eating with them he's not only demonstrating his power, his glory, his bodily confirmation of 'He is risen,' he's also demonstrating, 'I'm feeding you,' do you see. My appearance is feeding you. You are hungry, you are lonely, you are afraid, you are scared. And he does all of this and he eats.

But he does something more. He speaks, he eats, and I didn't say this yet, and it's this: He asks them to touch his feet and to touch his hands. This is important for Luke, because if this happened, it changes everything about our existence. It changes everything that we understand about time and life and divine power and the future. But Jesus does this by saying touch my hands and feet. That is something so profoundly, amazingly divine and glorious, but also something profoundly human. I've been doing some work around the house, and I'm reminded of just how sensitive my fingertips are, as are yours. God designed them with such an amazing array of nerves that just the smallest cut can be oh, so painful, because they're so sensitive.

How profoundly intimate and powerful and human and divine is it that Jesus says, Do you see the scars? Touch them. He's saying, take my hand, take my hand. I am risen. I am not a ghost. I am appearing to you as one of flesh and bone. He is victorious. And they need this, because remember the context? They are afraid. The passage tells us a couple of different things. We obviously heard that they need peace. They need *shalom* because they lack it. It tells us in verse 37 that they are startled and frightened, which doesn't really get at what's really going on there. Everything for them in that moment is changing forever. They just witnessed his crucifixion. In the most ignoble form of death, God the Son dying. And now he's there in glory saying, Touch me. They were more than frightened. They were full of fear in a proper sense. Can it be? They also had their own doubts which

were mixed with amazement and joy. The reason why I'm glad it's here is because I get to see the demonstration of the beauty of Christ. He doesn't judge them in their doubts. He doesn't dismiss and say that their fears are unimportant. He understands that they lack peace, but he comes to them in the midst of it to draw them out, to take them by the hand, as it were, to say I am risen, and it changes everything.

This is portrayed for me in a very different way, but in a similar way in a story that I heard this last week in an interview with a man by the name of Jack Leroy Tueller. He was a decorated World War II veteran. His story is very interesting. Consider what he said, and there was a movie made about this event in his life. He says this was two weeks after D-Day. It was dark, rainy, muddy. I'm stressed, so I get my trumpet out. And the commander says to me, Jack, don't play tonight because there is one sniper left. I thought to myself, that German sniper is as scared and lonely as I am. So I thought I'll play his love song. It was a famous German love song. The next morning an MP came to him and said we need you to go down to the beach with us, because a German prisoner on the beach keeps asking who played the trumpet last night. So I grabbed my trumpet, went down to the beach, and there was a nineteen-year-old German soldier, scared and lonesome. He was dressed like a French peasant to cloak his role as a sniper. And crying he said I couldn't fire because I thought of my fiancée, I thought of my mother and father. And he says my role is finished. And he stuck out his hand, and I shook the hand of the enemy. He was no enemy. He was scared and lonely like me.

Jesus was not lonely and scared, but by his resurrection body it was a trumpet song that the disciples needed to hear, that you and I need to hear. And it is God through his Son, through the power of the resurrection, reaching out his hand to the enemy, i.e., those who have rejected him, those who have been, quite honestly, happy with their sin. And yet Jesus has come for sinners. And he reaches out his hand and he says you are no enemy. I'm calling you out. And that call is, I am no longer in the grave. And you can know this resurrection. And that is what he longs for you and for me.

So that's why I need Luke to tell us this story. Because you and I haven't seen those hands and that feet. We need the testimony that someone went and investigated those who did see it, and it changed Luke's life. It changed Theophilus's life. And it's meant to change us, because resurrection has happened and victory over sin and death has been made known. And the disciples are amazed.

And he goes further. He then says to them, I give you a promise. In verses 44 through 47 he unpacks the promise. The promise is, everything that has been prophesied is being fulfilled. Verse 44, referring back to what he had taught them. "This is what I told you while I was still with you." Do you remember? he's saying. Those things I taught you concerning what was going to be the need of my going to the cross? That my name, in essence, being Jesus, I will save my people from their sins. Do you remember when I taught you everything must be fulfilled? And then he says this, a threefold promise, what is "written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms." This is Jesus, and the only place in the New Testament where that appears just like that, that the promises is, there will be a fulfillment, a fulfillment of what was prophesied concerning him from the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. He is saying that the promises is, what was prophesied in the Law of Moses, what was prophesied in the Prophets, what was promised in the Psalms have one focus, and that is Christ Jesus. And so the promise is these things are going to be fulfilled.

And then what he does is, he says in verse 45, "Then he opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day...'" So he moves from, there's going to be the promise of fulfillment, to showing them how that fleshes out in the focus on him. Now we don't have here written for us all the verses that he went through, but we can very briefly just consider this.

When he says the Law of Moses, he does not mean just the law as we find it in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. He means the first five books of Moses. He means what was prophesied in the earliest chapters of the Bible, at the point of sin of Adam and Eve, he began to announce that there is going to be a covenant of grace. There will be one who will come as the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent, but he will bruise his heel---pointing to the battle between God and Satan, which would find that God would have victory through his Son Jesus on the cross. And then it continues to be unpacked through the law. And all of those things---the righteousness of God is revealed in the law---were meant to be real for the people of God to hear. They were real historical events. But they were also more than that, they were a metaphor. They were a road sign pointing to what would come in the fulfillment of Jesus Christ, who is the righteousness of God demonstrated not on tablets of stone, but in the perfect God-man, Jesus Christ.

Consider also the prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, as they would prophesy about this one who would come to redeem his people, to lead the people of God back to the promised land, to restore Israel. Now they understood it one way in history, that Israel would be redeemed, that they would be able to go back to the land of Canaan. And while we see those things demonstrated in the Old Testament, they were also meant to be a metaphor for what Jesus would do. Rather than our returning to a physical land of Canaan, we are drawn to the ultimate land flowing with milk and honey, the body of Christ, whose body and blood is our redemption. And the land flowing with milk and honey and the land of Canaan that the prophets prophesied about wasn't just a physical place, it was meant to be a place of security and peace. It is Jesus who says, 'Come unto me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' The land was meant to be a place of rest. But that land was also to find its ultimate fulfillment in the perfect rest, not in a physical land, but in the perfect God-man, Jesus Christ.

And then in the Psalms. They find their focus in Jesus Christ over and over again. Consider just these two very short references. Psalm 16:9-10: "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." While that was David singing out to the Lord, praying for the Lord's security and care over him, it was simultaneously a prophecy pointing to Christ, who would go to the grave, but would not be abandoned there.

Then in Psalm 110 we hear these words---at the end of Psalm 109 and Psalm 110---they're really meant to be one psalm. It's a psalm of David. And it says: "With my mouth. I will greatly extol the Lord; in the great throng I will praise him. For he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save his life from those who condemn him." What happened to Christ at the cross? He was condemned. But then what happened on Easter Sunday morning? "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" While that was meant to be a promise that David could recognize and experience with the Lord as the King of Israel, it's also pointing to a greater David, the real King of the Jews, Jesus Christ---who was raised from condemnation and death, though he was without sin, raised on the third day and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. And the last enemy is death. And the resurrection in that day will be the trumpet call of God that death is now finished. This is what the disciples need. This is what you and I need. We need the fulfillment and the focus of these things, because we need Christ in his triumph, in his glory, who is victorious over sin and death, who is seated at the right hand of God the Father.

But just before he goes there he gives them a commission, and that commission is to go out and to be witnesses. You'll notice here in verse 47 he says, after he's demonstrated of what the focus of the prophecies were, he then says he given them the commission: "And repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Well, in this commission he's giving them the starting point. Everything from Jesus's birth until his resurrection was all driving towards Jerusalem. Now after his resurrection he's now telling his disciples, Now I'm going to send

you to Jerusalem, and then from Jerusalem to the rest of the world to witness, to preach, and to make disciples of all nations. He gives them the direction.

But more importantly, he gives them the power. Notice what he says. Verse 49: "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." That word 'power' is the Greek word *dunamis* from which we get the word dynamite. It is an explosive, powerful, deep reality that God, through Jesus Christ, tells his disciples: You can't be my witnesses, you can't go up from Jerusalem, you cannot go and make disciples, you cannot preach without the clothing, without the presence of the Holy Spirit, the dynamite of God, his presence at work in you and through you. This echoes what Jesus says to his disciples and to us who read it: Apart from me you can do nothing.

Imagine how easy it is as a preacher to get ready for a sermon each week, because you know that there will be people there, and you wonder what they're going to think, you wonder how they're going to respond---are they going to get this---and it's very easy to get into the rut of just doing the best you can to put a really good presentation to everybody, but miss the need for the Holy Spirit. This has come home to me year after year after year. And I know that I'm not alone, I know Pastor Flora believes the same. That aside from the Holy Spirit working in me---not just through me and not just the Holy Spirit working in and through me, but also in you---I cannot do this. Without the Holy Spirit I am hopeless. We need the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

But not only that. Notice what Jesus does. Verse 50: "When he had lead them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them." He blessed them. "And while he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven." So okay, what does that mean? What is Jesus doing? Does Jesus just go off into divine retirement? And everything else is up to the Holy Spirit? Well, the triune God is always working to glorify and to magnify and to work together for the purposes of the triune Godhead. But what I want to remind you of this morning is that while God through Christ has given us his Holy Spirit and we know that that Holy Spirit prays for us---even when we don't know what to pray---the Holy Spirit empowers us, the Holy Spirit works in us, reminding us of what Jesus taught. It's also something else going on. And it's buried here, though not in detail. It's here behind the words: "And he was taken up into heaven."

What is Jesus doing in heaven? Do you know if you are a Christian, and even if you are not you need to know, that Jesus is not up there sipping coffee. Ladies and gentlemen, he is interceding for you. He is praying for you. In Hebrews we hear this: He (speaking of Jesus), is able to completely save those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. He always lives to intercede for them. Christian. Jesus Christ came to earth and took on a human nature. He is the divine God-man, today and forever. That divine God-man is our prophet, he is our priest, and he is our king forever. And he is by the Father's right hand, and he is interceding, caring, praying for you. And he gives us his Spirit. Isn't that wonderful?

Do you need that? I need that. And it is worthy of praise, which leads me to my final point. Remember I started out and I said, so every Christian is called to be a witness, and the kind of witness that he calls us to be is something every Christian can do, whether you are five years old and you profess Christ or you're ninety-five years old, and everyone in between. The kind of witness we are called to be is right here, the very last verse, where he says, verse 52, 53: "Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stay continually at the temple, praising God."

Do you hear what the witness is? The witness is nothing short than taking out our trumpets and singing praise to God in worship. Because when we worship we are fulfilling that which Jesus prayed for us in his high priestly prayer: That we who have not seen him, who have believed the message that we have read, would be gathered together as one. And when are we to gather together as one?

When we worship---and with one voice and one heart we love one another and love the Lord and we worship him together. Which is why our confession says: "What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and to enjoy him forever."

If you doubt what I'm saying, know this. This passage ends with the disciples returning and worshiping. We will see in the early chapters of Acts that the Holy Spirit comes on them. And guess what they continue to do? Worship. Guess what the result is? People see and are witnessed to by the worship of God's people. And the Word tells us: "And there were added to their number daily those who were being saved." We get to worship and proclaim his name, to trumpet and proclaim the glory and grace of Christ, the victorious Christ who has been raised from the dead---who we've got an account of his 'risen-ness' and of his victory, the fact that he has come to equip us with power to worship and to witness.

My friends, what the Lord needs for us to be are not his prosecutors to prosecute those in the world who may not believe. What he needs are not judges to go out and judge the world---that is the Lord's doing. He does not need defense attorneys. He calls us to witness. And a witness who has witnessed something is changed forever and cannot help but tell what they have seen. When I pray, Lord, open our eyes that we may see wondrous things in your Word, I am praying that the Lord would so move in us by his Spirit to enable us to see to the depths of his Word the beauty and the glory of the Lord, that we cannot help but respond in praise. That the nations may know that he is risen. May the Lord make us a worshiping people to witness for him.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we need your Spirit to move in us to worship, to adore, and to glorify you. Father, we pray that the worship that we conduct together would not be any praise to us---not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory to witness and to testify of your grace and mercy, your death and resurrection and victory that is ours in Jesus Christ, and the new life you give. Lord, help us to sing, to trumpet, and to proclaim Christ. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.