

Subject: The Wonder of the Gospel

Subtitle: Beholding Him in All of His Redeeming Work Video

Our first reading opens with the question, “***Why do you wonder at this?***”¹ The Gospel is filled with the mystery of wonder. Luke’s account tells us how the Lord appeared to the disciples as they were gathered together on the evening of the first Easter Day. Earlier that same day, the women discovered that Christ’s tomb was empty and they saw two angels who told them that Christ had risen. But “their words seemed to the eleven and all the rest, as an idol tale, and they did not believe them.”² Yet there was still the wonder of whether it could be true. Then, later that day, they heard the witness of two disciples whom our Lord appeared to on the road to Emmaus. Then, to their total astonishment, “***Jesus stood among them and said, ‘Peace to you!’***”³

Luke, in his description of this event, stated, “***They were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.***”⁴ This sudden, mysterious appearance of their crucified Master in their midst was not what they ever expected. It terrified them with the awe and wonder of encountering something otherworldly. Their feelings reminded me of my experience of seeing an outer space science fiction movie at a young age. When the flying saucer landed, and the door opened, goosebumps arose on my arms and back. I was frozen to the TV and couldn’t look away. My imagination started to spin out of control, and then suddenly (and thankfully), a TV commercial broke my fearful trance and brought me back to reality.

¹ Acts 3:12

² Luke 24:11

³ Luke 24:36

⁴ Luke 24:37

Jesus had to do something similar when he broke the fear that filled their hearts with the repeated words of comfort and affirmation, **“Peace be with you.”** Peace was the last gift he left his disciples; now, it is the first gift they received after he overcame death and the grave. Jesus comforts them and asks them, ***“Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?”***⁵

We all have doubts, and as we learned last week from Jesus’ encounter with Thomas, sometimes faith begins with doubt.

My personal faith journey began when I honestly prayed, “Lord, I don’t see the reality of your resurrection. If it is true, you must show it to me.” In his mercy, the Lord answered that prayer, and when he did, I dedicated my life to him.

Doubt seems to be a natural part of our human makeup, but faith can be nurtured if we remind ourselves about who God is and what he has done in the past. That memory is like “The word that is near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart (which Paul said in his letter to the Romans is the word of faith that we proclaim).”⁶ That word of faith also reminds us of who we are as God’s children. In our New Testament lesson today, St. John states, “See what manner of love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are.”⁷ Taking hold of this precious promise offers takes divine help. For this reason, the Apostle Paul wrote, ***“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better.”***⁸ That revelation helps us to see the reality of God’s promises, and it helps to know ***“his mighty strength that was***

⁵ Luke 24:38

⁶ Romans 10:9

⁷ 1 John 3:1

⁸ Ephesians 1:17

exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.”⁹

When the disciples were wondering if the resurrection could possibly be true, Jesus patiently took them step by step and helped them understand the truth about this startling new reality, especially since they initially thought they were seeing a ghost.

Similarly, many in our culture are too quick to dismiss or attach some spiritualized form of symbolic meaning to the details of Christ’s resurrection. However, nothing in Luke’s account supports a mythical or allegorical interpretation of events. The language used is both literal and physical. Jesus clearly states, ***“I am not a phantom. I have flesh and bones. Look at me and see.”¹⁰*** Then, to give irrefutable proof, he asks them to touch him and eats a piece of fish in front of them. He wanted them to know with certainty that what they were seeing was real. Then, he helped them to understand what these things meant, as he ***“opened their minds to understand the scriptures.”¹¹***

In one of my favorite childhood movies, “The Wizard of Oz,” the first part is all in black and white. Then, after the tornado sweeps Dorothy and her dog to the land of Oz (Do you remember that scene?), everything from that point on in the movie is transformed into living colors. To her utter amazement, Dorothy’s first words are, “I don’t think we are in Kansas anymore.”

This kind of transformation occurs when the resurrection becomes a personal reality. Everything from that moment on changes.

The black-and-white world that Dorothy was born into reminds me of the time when I was looking at a psychedelic 3D

⁹ Ephesians 1:19-20

¹⁰ Paraphrase of Luke 24:39

¹¹ Luke 24:45

picture that appeared like a jumble of colorful dots on the surface. Yet I was told it contained a 3D image, which was not readily apparent. The store clerk where the picture was being displayed had to guide me. He told me not to look at the picture's surface but that I had to look through the picture to see the 3D image. Then, all of a sudden, a transformation happened, and a 3D image of dolphins leaping out of water unexpectedly appeared. I was astonished.

There is a sermon in that illustration because we, too, cannot merely focus on what can be measured by our natural senses. But with eyes opened by God's Spirit, we can see that the Gospel is more than mere words; it is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. Due to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, life has changed, and in him, all things have become new.

Now, we can know with certainty that ***“everything written about Jesus in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”***¹² Now, in the light of Christ's death and resurrection, we can confidently proclaim ***“repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all peoples and nations.”***¹³

I love how Bill and Gloria Gaither expressed this hope in a hymn that brings it down to where we live. The title is “Because He Lives.” The words go:

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living, just because He lives. *Amen*

¹² Luke 24:44

¹³ Luke 24:47