

“I AM Myself”

Luke 24.36–49

³⁶While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be to you.” ³⁷But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. ³⁸And He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. ⁴¹While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴²They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; ⁴³and He took it and ate it before them.

⁴⁴Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” [NASB]

HOPE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Rev. Chris Robinson

4th April, 2010

I. Introduction

Well, we didn't make it. Not that we were trying, mind you. Here it is Resurrection Sunday, and according to our progress in John, Jesus was only just about to be brought before Pilate. But this is good. Our focus in John upon Christ's passion is lengthy, so jumping ahead into Luke to Christ's resurrection for a Sunday isn't a bad idea. But then, God's providence never is. It is an interesting perspective, actually. We jump from Jesus standing among His disciples before His death to Jesus standing among His disciples after His death. And in one way, not much has changed. In another, of course, everything has. Furthermore, a lot has yet to change. We'll consider all three.

II. Not Much has Changed

Not much has changed. The disciples are still standing around scratching their heads. Talking about “these things.” Talking about what some of them had seen, and others had not. Talking about seeing the Lord really risen. Oh, come on! They should have expected that! But no... they're still standing around scratching their heads. Some of them trying to get others to believe them; the others trying to get the some to admit it wasn't *really* the risen Lord. I wonder how long it took them to turn around and notice He Himself stood in their midst. Did He kind of clear His throat to get their attention? Did he just start right in with “Peace to you”? Whatever, they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit.

Oh no... they weren't just being jumpy! They were *terrified*. This is like when the Israelites were waiting at the foot of Mount Sinai to meet God, and there were thunder and lightning flashes and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people *trembled*.^{Ex19.16} (same word) This is like in Joshua when the men of Ai struck down 36 of the supposedly indestructible Israelites... the hearts of all the people *melted* (sm wd) and became as water.^{Jos7.5} The disciples weren't just jumpy, they were terrified and agitated. Sometimes that happens when God shows up. But why did it happen when God shows up saying “Peace to you”?

Well, not much has changed. And Jesus isn't slow to get in their faces about the fact that not much has changed when in reality everything has changed. He says to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” You remember that word? Troubled? Why do people ever get “troubled” in the Bible? There are only two reasons that word ever shows up. It is because either God has come near and they are still under the Covenant of Works (and all who are under the CoW are weighed in the balance and found wanting)... or... God has come near, and even though they are under the Covenant of Grace, they *feel* like Christ (the Mediator of that grace) is far away.

Well that's just grand, isn't it? Here they are, scratching their heads in unison, all of them under the Covenant of Grace, and Jesus is right there in their very midst. And they are *troubled!* There can be only one conclusion. They feel like Jesus is far away. That is to say, they don't think Jesus is right there in their very midst. It is Something Else that has shown up, but certainly not Jesus. Hey, you'd be troubled too. And so would I. A ghost is pretty powerful, and what can you do to keep a ghost from hurting you? Pull your sword? Your Glock? Your steel and your lead will go right through.

Happily, Jesus isn't going to let them get away with thinking He's just a spirit. Their hope—and ours—depends on it. In fact, He's not going to let them get away with thinking He's anything at all. Anything... that is... other than Who and What He is. “Look at my hands and feet: see the nail holes? Still there!” Of course, in John we'll see how Jesus also pointed out the spear-wound in His side. And what's His point? What is Jesus' point? This is His point: “I AM.” I AM Myself. I know, the translation says “it is I Myself.” Take it that way if you want, or step it up to the Greek

text in which the construction allows for consistency with the I AM claims He has made elsewhere: “I AM Myself.”

What’s His point? The same I AM who in the Person of the Son went to the cross is the I AM who is now standing in their midst. See? Not much has changed. The very same Jesus who went to the cross is the Jesus who arose from the tomb. The only difference is He went to the cross and tomb in humiliation; now He appears in exaltation. And not much has changed. Let me show you how little has changed for the disciples.

When Jesus says “Peace to you,” it is not a mere greeting, any more than “I AM” in Gethsemane was a mere self-identification to help out His arresters. “Peace to you” was not a mere “Dudes!” any more than “I AM” was a mere “Yo!” When Jesus says, “Peace to you,” it is an utterance, an exercise of *power*. “I AM” in the Garden flattened a battalion of soldiers. “Peace to you” is no less powerful. Spiritual *power*. Power to save you from the immeasurable weight of your enmity with God who infinitely abhors your sins. “Peace to you” is a powerful proclamation removing the hostility between you and God. Peace! Shalom! And yet even with all that power, the disciples are reluctant to relax.

So Jesus pulls out all the stops. “Touch Me.” No, He does not mean like the apes touching the monolith in 2001: A Space Odyssey, gingerly touching it with the tips of their fingers and then jumping back as apes do. NOT! Jesus said, “TOUCH ME!” “HANDLE ME” “GROPE ME” “GET YOUR ARMS AROUND THIS BODY OF ME! DON’T TAKE YOUR HANDS AWAY UNTIL YOU ARE CONVINCED THAT I AM FLESH AND BONE! JUST LIKE WHEN I WENT TO THE CROSS AND THE TOMB!” Later on, He will say to Tommy, er, Thomas, “See Me, Feel Me, Touch Me, *Believe* Me.” This is why John later wrote in his epistle, ^{1Jn1.1NKJv} “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have *handled*, concerning the Word of life.”

And yet they’re *still* scratching their heads, *still* not believing. Ironically, their joy is too great! Oh, don’t be so surprised. Have you never taken a long, deep, slow draught of a special gift of joy... and yet just trembled for fear that it is too good to be true? Surely it will be taken away and leave you weeping with loss and disappointment?...

So, Jesus polishes off His presentation by asking for some food. Ever seen a ghost eat fish? It’s quite a sight. The fish goes into the mouth, taking on a little shimmer. Then the morsel drops down the esophagus... but just keeps on going and drops through one of his legs into his sandal, bounces once tickling his wispy Achilles, and rolls out of his heel to the side. And then the cat comes along bats the fish with its front paw and gobbles it up. Then he looks up with a grin and a little wink to the ghost... and with a meow says, “Thanks, dude! See ya in my next life!”

That’s what you see when you see a ghost eating a piece of fish. Not so here. Jesus was no ghost. I AM Myself. Not much has changed. Your hope and my hope depends on it. If Jesus did not arise as flesh and bones, you and I would have no reason to believe that He would raise us up so that we could eat salmon... or catfish... in heaven. But He did... and He will.

III. Everything has Changed

On the first hand, not much has changed, as Jesus stands there amidst the disciples... but on the second hand, *everything* has changed. Here is your first clue: *you already know it*.⁴⁴ “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” The Law of Moses said God would send a Seed to crush the head of the serpent at the cost of His own life.^{Gen3.15} The Law of Moses said God Himself would provide the Lamb to sacrifice in place

of Isaac and his descendents of faith.^{Gen22.8} The Law of Moses said God by no means leaves the guilty unpunished,^{Ex34.7} and the Law of Moses says God, by sacrificial atonement, will cover the sins of the guilty that they might be made righteous.

The Prophets say that ^{Zec13.14}“In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity.”... and Jesus showed His disciples the holes in His hands, feet, and side from whence that fountain flowed. The prophets speak of a Servant who would bear our griefs, carry our sorrows, be pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, upon Whom the chastening for our well-being would fall, and by Whose scourging we would be healed, as He is slaughtered like a lamb.⁵³ The Prophets speak of One upon the palms of Whose hands our names are inscribed^{49.16} ... and Jesus showed just how we are inscribed when He showed the disciples the nail-marks in His hands.

The Psalms say this One would be forsaken by His Father.^{22.1} The Psalms say God would not abandon this One to Sheol or allow Him to undergo decay.^{16.10} The Psalms say this One would be raised up to sit at God’s right hand with all His enemies under His feet... the One who is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek... which means He is a priest forever for all who trust in Him by *faith*.

Do you see what I mean? Everything has changed. The One of whom the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms spoke, had come and suffered, and risen from the dead on the third day... *and He was standing right there in the midst of His disciples*. More proof? Jesus said *TOUCH ME*. Everything has changed! When God came into the midst of the Israelites way back at Sinai, they came to a mountain and ^{Heb12.19}“...begged that no further word be spoken to them.²⁰For they could not bear the command, ‘if even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned.’²¹And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, “I am full of fear and trembling.”

But now everything has changed, for the Scripture says, ^{Heb12.22}“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, ... and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,²⁴*and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.*”

You can not come near God when you are not at peace with God. But now Jesus has come and has made peace with God for us. And behold, I AM, Himself, standing in the midst of His disciples. He does not say, “Stand back, lest I destroy you.” He says, “TOUCH ME! I AM Myself.” Not much has changed... and yet *everything has changed*.

IV. Lots Has Yet to Change

On the third hand... (I guess cats can say that)... *A lot has yet to change*. And that is why Jesus commissions the disciples to proclaim His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Did you notice that Jesus didn’t just set out on a grand tour mission trip of all the nations Himself? Evidently Jesus thinks it will be more effective to send His disciples, to send His Church, rather than to go packing across the countryside and over the seas Himself. And He didn’t even need a boat to walk across the pond!

Well, you see, Jesus has a date with His Father to keep. In a few days Jesus will ascend to His Father in heaven... and then He will pour out His Spirit upon the Church just as the Father had promised. A lot has yet to change. For one thing, there are lots more people in the world who need to hear our witness. No longer just the Jews, now the proclamation must be made available to *everyone in the world*. *EVERYONE*. There are now no exclusionary boundaries constraining who might hear and believe.

A lot has yet to change. The entire world, you see, is living on the assumption that we will be “all set” if we just do this and that. If we just do the right thing. But Jesus never says that. Why, if even the disciples couldn’t even *get it* until, as the text says, Jesus “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,” then there’s no reason to think anybody can *do it* until Jesus does it for us. What does Jesus say? Jesus breathes on His disciples and says, “Promise,” “Repentance,” “Forgiveness of sins,” and “In His name.” This is *not* a matter of “doing it.” This is a matter of *receiving it* through trusting in Jesus *already having done it* for us.

That is the proclamation the disciples take to the nations. Jesus has done it for us. Or as the bible says, “God helps those who help themselves.” ... Huh? That verse isn’t in the Bible?... What? You think the Bible doesn’t say that? Why, it is the sum and substance of the Bible! Not a soul sitting in this room would have any hope of heaven if God didn’t help those who helped themselves! Every one of us has spent some large portion of our lives doing nothing but helping ourselves... where would we be if God didn’t step in and help us instead? If we weren’t helping ourselves, we wouldn’t need the Lord to help us!

Lord help us! We’ve been helping ourselves, and only getting more and more into the debt of our sins and sinfulness! If you have *never been forgiven* of your sins, you have been doing nothing but helping yourself! We need *Jesus* to say to us, “Peace!” We need *Him* to open our minds to understand that He has died to satisfy the death God’s holy law requires for our sins! We need *Him* to open our minds to understand that He has risen from the dead—flesh and bone, body and soul—breaking the power of sin and death and proving His sacrifice acceptable on our behalf.

Or, Lord help us! We whose sins *have* been forgiven, continue to hinder our own growth by insisting on helping ourselves. It is only by His grace, His promise, that the Lord Jesus Christ is formed within us!^{gal4.19} Only by His grace can we faithfully encourage one another by making known the mystery which is *Christ in you, the hope of glory*.^{col1.27}

Oh yes, a lot has yet to change. And this is how it happens. Not just in worship services. It happens in proclaiming His name... beginning in Jerusalem... for us, that means the Church. Proclaiming His Name in Word and Sacrament, and in our love and *care* for one another. The risen Christ is formed in you as you overflow *His* helping *you*... to *your* helping *others*.

Consider the example. Christ was not a wealthy, popular, in-the-groove-kind of guy. Especially by the end of that week! So what happened? Did somebody in the church—you know, the best known minister of the biggest church around—go up and knock, knock, knock on heaven’s door and say, “Halloooo in there! We’re just havin’ a wee bit o’ trouble down home, mind lend us a hand?” (As Paul rhetorically asks in Romans 10.6.)

Or, then, did they send an ambassador all decked out in fine regalia, with all the biggest church-business magnates, into the abyss to haul Christ up from the dead?^{ro10.7} No. I AM Myself led the way. I AM Myself led the way down, and I AM Myself led the way up. In the lowliest of lowly estates. And now, what do you see? The Least became the Greatest.

That is how lots will change. Don’t expect the best known, most comfortable Christians to lead the way in changing a lot of things. The ones who will lead the way are the ones who lead you into the greatest dependency upon Christ. So that when you pray “Lord help us” you will mean it. *That* is what needs to change. Hearts saying “Lord help us” and meaning it.

And those who are most uncomfortable are the ones who are going to show us what it means to cry “Lord help us” and mean it. That is why I say they will be the ones out in front leading the way. They don’t need you or me to drag them up out of their distress, as we grumble

about the drain on our church finances and ministerial energy. They are not the anchors in a lot changing. No, our own feet are the real anchors. Our own hearts, that is.

So how about we start looking at those who are the least, and recognizing that they are the ones by whom the Lord is leading us into the fullness of joy, because through their lowliness Christ is being formed in them. Why? So that in them we can behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is in heaven with the Father, so for us to see Him, we need to see Him formed in those who are following Him through this valley of the shadow of death.

A lot has yet to change. The lowliest of the lowly arose and is now seated at God's right hand. Through the lowliest, now, He is changing a lot of things, a lot of souls. That is why the church in this world will never be high. When the church gets high, things stop changing. When the church is low, a lot of things change. Are you one of them? Are you willing to follow the lowly, and let the Risen Savior change you?

He arose from the dead for that very purpose.