

**What Now?**  
**Jesus Appears to the Disciples**  
**Luke 24:36-53**  
**Layne Lebo**  
**April 14, 2024**

In December, at the beginning of Advent, we began a nine-month journey through the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. These New Testament books were written by a 1<sup>st</sup> Century follower of Jesus named Luke, a medical doctor and a missionary companion of the Apostle Paul. Luke meticulously recorded what he knew of Jesus and of the first years of the early church in the third and fifth books of our New Testament.

This morning, we'll wrap up our exploration of Luke's gospel. Then on May 5, we'll begin our study of Acts.

I've titled this series "What Now?" Jesus has been crucified, and the reality of his resurrection is starting to sink in—so what now? The simple answer to that question is the Holy Spirit. Before we look at the last half of Luke 24 and look more closely at Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit, I want each of us to consider an important question: What is the core of your faith? If you were to boil it down to one word or phrase, what lies at the heart of your faith? Some of us here this morning might say "The Bible," because the Bible is God's Word, given to us by God to reveal Himself to us. Others among us might respond that the core of our faith is obedience—following the 10 Commandments and other instructions in the Old and New Testaments. Another might respond with the conviction that our faith is primarily about loving others and caring for them.

The Bible, obedience to God and his Word, and loving others are all indispensable elements of our faith, but what distinguishes Christianity from every other religion and belief system is that it rests on our relationship with God as revealed to us through his Son, Jesus Christ, and sustained through his Holy Spirit who lives in those of us who have placed our faith in Jesus.

I mentioned last week that the transition period between Jesus' resurrection on Easter and Pentecost is an important bridge between the three and a half years Jesus walked on the earth and the arrival of his Holy Spirit. We'll talk about this more in several weeks, but the

symbolism surrounding the Holy Spirit coming on Pentecost is fascinating. Pentecost, known by the Jewish people as the Festival of Seven Weeks, celebrated God's revelation of Himself to his people through the giving of the Law, including the 10 Commandments. During the Pentecost celebration immediately following Jesus' death and resurrection, God revealed Himself anew through the giving of his Holy Spirit.

It's important for us to slow down to look closely at this bridge period between Jesus' resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, because it marks the transition of the disciples' (and our) relationship with God from the person of Jesus Christ to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One who God has given to us so we might know Him, be empowered by Him, and walk in relationship with Him.

Before we look at Jesus' appearance to his disciples, let me recap what has taken place since Jesus rose from the tomb just 12–15 hours earlier:

- First, very early in the morning on Easter Sunday, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and some other women who aren't named went to the tomb where Jesus was buried and found the stone rolled away and his body missing. Two angels appeared to them and told them Jesus wasn't there; He was risen.
- After hearing the women's report, which seemed like nonsense to the disciples, Peter ran to the tomb and found things just as the women had said.
- Then the risen Jesus appeared to a man named Cleopas and his traveling companion as they were on a seven-mile walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Jesus talked with them and explained the Scriptures to them, but they didn't recognize who He was until He broke bread, gave thanks, and distributed it to them. When they recognized Him, He disappeared from their sight.
- The travelers quickly went back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples what they had seen, and in their report, they mentioned that Jesus had also appeared to Peter.

That brings us to today's Scripture passage, Luke 24:36–53.

<sup>36</sup> While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

<sup>37</sup> They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. <sup>38</sup> He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? <sup>39</sup> 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.”

<sup>40</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. <sup>41</sup> And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate it in their presence.

<sup>44</sup> 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.”

<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> 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.”

<sup>50</sup> When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. <sup>53</sup> And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

I want to highlight several things in these verses. First, and probably most importantly, this is Jesus’ first appearance to all of the disciples and other believers together. Prior to this, his appearances and the news of his resurrection have been isolated (remember that it’s still Easter Sunday), but here He has revealed Himself to all of them.

I also find it interesting that in this appearance, Jesus seemed intent on helping his disciples try to comprehend that He was both divine and human, spirit and flesh. Jesus’ nature

is hard enough for us to grasp, but after 2,000 years and with our knowledge of the New Testament—that they didn't have at that time—we have some understanding. This was all new to them. Jesus told them to look at his hands and feet so they could see his wounds from the nails. He instructed them to touch Him, and He said, "A ghost doesn't have flesh and bones like I have." Then He asked for a piece of fish, which He ate in their presence.

Jesus also took this time with them to teach them, to help connect what He told them when He was with them and what the Jewish Scriptures prophesied about Him with what they were actually seeing and experiencing as they interacted with the resurrected Jesus. In verse 45 of Luke 24 we read, "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." Previously when Jesus had talked with them about his death and resurrection, their minds weren't able to comprehend, but now Jesus opened their minds and hearts so they could see how the Scriptures pointed to his suffering, death, and resurrection.

Jesus also pointed out them to what would happen next. He told them repentance would be preached for the forgiveness of sins in his name and that they were the witnesses of all of this. In verse 49 we read, "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." Again, this may not have made a lot of sense to them, but this is what unfolded on Pentecost as we'll read in Acts 2.

Finally, Jesus led them out of the city to Bethany, where He blessed them and was taken up to heaven. The disciples worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem, where they remained at the temple, praising God and waiting for God's promise to be revealed. In his account, Luke seems to compress Jesus' appearances together, because in some of the other gospel accounts, we read of other events over the course of these 50 days. For example, John records Jesus' interaction with Peter at the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus restored Peter after his denials of Jesus during the night and early morning before Jesus was crucified. This is another example of the benefits of the four gospels. We have accounts of who Jesus was and what He did from four different perspectives.

During this four-week series I've titled "What Now?" we're following the story line between Jesus' crucifixion and Pentecost. My main desire in these weeks is that we think in a fresh way about the Holy Spirit and take kind of an inventory of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If

relationship with Jesus is the core of our faith, fully experiencing all our Heavenly Father has for us as his children means we'll walk in step with the Holy Spirit—receiving his love and support, being led by Him into truth, seeing life from his perspective as we're guided by his voice, and being transformed by his ongoing work in our lives. The Holy Spirit is the provision God the Father and Jesus have made available to us. The only way for us to walk in relationship with Jesus as God intends requires us to be filled with and attuned to the Holy Spirit living in us and working through us.

I mentioned last week that Jesus' teaching in John 14–16 is the clearest summary we have of who the Holy Spirit is and of what He does in our lives. Again, this morning I'd like to read some selected verses to you from these chapters. I ask you to meditate on them and receive them as Jesus' gift to you.

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. – John 14:16–18

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:26–27

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.<sup>27</sup> And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning. – John 15:26–27

<sup>7</sup> But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.<sup>12</sup> “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.<sup>13</sup> But when he, the Spirit of truth,

comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. <sup>15</sup> All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.” – John 16:7, 12–15

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” – John 16:33

The concept of the Holy Spirit can seem mysterious and somewhat nebulous to us, especially compared with God the Father and Jesus, whom we can more easily conceptualize. Jesus’ disciples struggled to understand what He was saying when He talked about the coming of the Holy Spirit, and so can we. Today, I hope to make this more tangible for us.

On Easter Sunday, I had the privilege of baptizing Jonah Roth, and Pastor Cindy baptized Jonah’s wife, Alexis. When I met with Jonah and Alexis the Saturday prior to Holy Week, they shared their spiritual journeys with me, and I was deeply touched by the journey God has them on and by the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Both were introduced to Jesus as children but wandered away. Over the past year or so, God has drawn them back to Him, and they’re seeing Him work in their lives in a very special way.

Something Jonah said as we met really stuck with me. He said that when he returned to Jesus, he immediately saw God making significant changes in how he lived and how he treated people. Jonah was excited to see God changing him. He said for the first couple months, he viewed his faith as checking off boxes of things God wanted him to work on and change in his life. He had previously struggled with lying, and as God gave him victory over that, he checked off that box. However, not too long into his faith journey, the Holy Spirit revealed a life-changing truth to him. The Holy Spirit pointed out to Jonah that his faith wasn’t about checking off boxes; it was about a relationship with Jesus. His faith wasn’t about him working hard to change bad habits or to try and follow the Bible’s rules. His faith was dependent on his relationship with

Jesus, and the changes that were taking place in his life were the result of the Holy Spirit working in and through him.

When I heard Jonah say that, it impacted me deeply, because that truth lies at the heart of our faith. God's call to each of us as his children isn't for us to work hard at being good and striving to do better. His call is for us to submit ourselves to his Holy Spirit so that the Spirit of Jesus can do his work of transformation in us. Do you see the difference? It's the difference between religion and relationship. Viewing our faith as a religion says, "I'll work hard to clean myself up and to live right so God accepts me and loves me." Understanding we're in a relationship says, "I'm loved unconditionally by Jesus. As I embrace the call to be his son or daughter, Jesus fills me with his Spirit and brings about transformation in my life." Our obedience to Jesus flows from our relationship with Him—from our love for Him and our desire to please Him, not out of human attempts to please Him and gain his favor.

My heart is that each of us would know and experience the joy and peace of relationship with Jesus Christ through his Holy Spirit rather than viewing our faith as dependent on our efforts to please God by doing right. This is a major shift in our life perspective. When Jesus appeared to the disciples, Luke explains in verse 45, "then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." My prayer is that our minds would be open to receive truth about the Holy Spirit—that we would attune our hearts to his voice and to receiving his direction and that we would walk in obedience to his voice. As Jesus said in John 14:26–27, "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."