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Hutterthal Mennonite Church

18 April 2021

Luke 24:36-49

These Things

Hutterthal Mennonite Church, good morning! And good morning to all of you who are joining us from the comfort of your homes. We worship in limited forms this morning, but we earnestly await a soon-coming day when normalcy returns. Let us pray: God of resurrection and renewal, we thank you for the role that you have given to each of us as witnesses to your power and work in our world. You are renewing and restoring all of creation, starting with the hearts, minds, and bodies of your image-bearers through the work of Jesus Christ. We pray that we can witness to not only how you have transformed us but how we are seeing you transform all of creation around us. Renew us with your spirit and strength as we tell others about you and your in-breaking kingdom of grace and peace. Empower our mouths to speak, our ears to hear, and our eyes to see your presence in and around us today! In Jesus's name. Amen.

During my junior year in high school, my English teacher gave the class some specific rules about writing college papers, some of which I remember today. The first and most important piece of advice for writing was that we picture every writing assignment as an opportunity to talk our reader into something. He would say that an objective, informative essay is not possible. No matter the writer or the content, all authors had particular biases that shaped their writing and had specific decisions that skewed their presentation of their material. Another rule for writing is to never begin a sentence with there is or there are. Find a better way of forming your sentence with the actual subject and action intended. A third guaranteed way to

lose points on a paper was to use pronouns (they, she, he, or it) without a clear pathway for the reader to understand what the pronoun is replacing. For example, an author might write: “It was raining so hard that we had to stop the car,” to which my English teacher would often circle the word *it* and put a question mark next to the word, implying what is *it*. Certain over-used adverbs like very or extremely were banned also from this writing course. Now, before you walk out our of boredom and a need to get away from my grammatical banter, I spent these short moments describing these rules because my sermon title would have made my English teacher cringe back in high school. In fact, his advice immediately popped into my head when I emailed Kathy with the sermon text and title. Why? Because I used the nondescriptive and vague word *things*. This word *things*, specifically from our scripture reading this morning, begs the writer and translator to answer some specific questions about what *things* they might be talking about. Jesus tells his disciples, “You are witnesses of these things” in Luke 24:48. What *things* are you referring to Jesus? Events, people, places, dogs, cats, books, feelings, imaginings, facts, opinions? I found this moment in the scriptures when “these things” was the chosen phrase quite frustrating in its vagueness. My English teacher would have told me that better words and writing were possible.

As you listened this morning to Luke’s telling of the same story that we studied last Sunday, you might be wondering what more there is to say about a story that I already spoke about from John that appears quite similarly in Luke. As I’ve told you before, I like to talk, so I can always come up with more to say. We enter Luke’s gospel narrative later in what seems to be Easter Sunday. Jesus has already met the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, broken bread with them, and then disappeared when they realized who he was. Immediately, they ran the seven miles back to Jerusalem. When they return to the other disciples, these two followers

witness to what the women at the tomb already told the eleven disciples, but the disciples are still skeptical, that is, until Jesus appears right in the middle of their conversation.

What was implied in John's gospel is now explicitly written in Luke's. The disciples are thinking that whatever this apparition is that has appeared to them and looks like their old teacher, it cannot be the physical Jesus. In the surrounding Greco-Roman culture, a disembodied spirit would not have been unheard of in the writings of the day, especially if the particular person had not had a proper burial. Was Jesus's ghost coming to tell them that his body needed to be returned to its proper resting place? Only the Jews believed that there was resurrection of the physical body at the final judgment, but that was not this moment because God's Messiah had not ushered in the age of a renewed Israel, or had he? Jesus leads them through the conversation slowly, first extending his peace, a sign that he is not a hostile spiritual force or deity out to destroy them. Jesus also is not merely a revived corpse or reanimated old body. Whatever this new body was like, it was different and yet still similar to our bodies because it bore the marks of his suffering and death at the hands of the Romans. However, this body is different because Jesus doesn't seem to walk through the door to enter the room. Luke then writes about Jesus's hands and feet, slightly different than John's focus on his hands and side.

Even after seeing all of this evidence, the disciples at this moment are still struggling to make sense of Jesus as anything more than a ghost or a zombie, so Jesus does with them what he did with the disciples in Emmaus. He eats with them, asking for fish this time, hearkening back to the feeding of the 5,000 when Jesus revealed who he was and the kind of kingdom that he led by supplying enough food for everyone with 5 loaves of bread and two fish. Just like he did for the disciples on the way to Emmaus, Jesus opens their minds to how he has fulfilled what the Jewish scriptures, what we call the old testament or some call the first testament, has been

fulfilled in him. All that Israel had been unable to accomplish in their covenant with God as God's chosen people had been accomplished through Jesus, the true embodiment of the nation of Israel and suffering servant for the sins that had caused Israel's perpetual exile.

Even though a small portion of people from the Babylonian exile had made it back to Jerusalem and rebuilt portions of the city walls and the temple, the feeling among the people was not that the exile was over, but ongoing because a revolving door of empires continued to dominate the city and its people throughout the intertestamental period. From the point in 587 BCE when Jerusalem was laid waste by the Babylonians to Jesus's own time in the first century CE, just over 600 years, Israel only had about 100 years under the Jewish Hasmonean Dynasty when the Maccabean family reclaimed Jerusalem, but the Romans would come in and conquer Jerusalem about 60 years before Jesus was born. For all intents and purposes, the exile had never officially ended, nor had God fulfilled all of the promises that God had made through the prophets of a renewed and greater Israel, of a restored Jerusalem filled with God's glory.

What the disciples are realizing in Jesus's unveiling of the scriptures in Luke 24:45 is that they have been misreading and misunderstanding the old testament this entire time. The coming of the Messiah and God's kingdom, promised in the prophets and the rest of the scriptures, was not going to happen in the way that the disciples and the rest of Israel had expected. The nation of Israel of the first century was fully expecting another violent liberator and king as Judas Maccabeus had been with the Hasmonean dynasty. But God's kingdom was never to come through the same tactics and violence as the world's empires as brutal as they were. God was not going to bless the entire world through his chosen people, the Israelites, by conquering the world through violence and instituting God's own form of Marshall Law or supreme rule, in which obedience was forced out of fear of death or exile. God was not going to raise up a great army of

soldiers to march out against Caesar or to lay siege to Jerusalem and rid the entire city of its Roman soldiers and leaders. The great leader, the Messiah, that God had promised was not going to murder all of his enemies and build another government on the backs of more subjugated people like the Israelites had been for so many years already. As sweet in their ears as revenge sounded to the Jews of the 1st century, their God revealed in Jesus had no use for vengeance because he knew it would not bring true peace and restoration. The same is true for us today when we plan our revenge on those who have hurt us personally or corporately or when we think that we must force the people around us to bend to our will or obey our particular views of God and the world. God's plan for the kingdom that Jesus began in his life, death, and resurrection was not to draw us in and weight us down with heavier, more severe burdens than the burdens of sin and brokenness that are plaguing all of us. As Jesus said during his ministry, "my yoke is easy and my burden is light." God's kingdom is not our kingdom.

Quite to the contrary, forgiveness of sins, repentance, and the end of exile were only going to come when Messiah had experienced the humiliation, resurrection, and proclamation that God had made known through the scriptures but that the people of those same scriptures had missed. God's promised leader, the Messiah, the Christ, came in humble and dignified ways to call the world back to its Creator and Sustainer. Rather than a white horse and soldiers, the true leader and example of God's way came riding on a donkey with peasants and impoverished followers in tow. When tempted to call on legions of angels to save him, the true king accepted his crown and robe from his executioners and carried his throne to the place of his death, where he was enthroned as king on a cross for all to see and mock because no true king or power-holder can be crucified. What kind of leader is that? When the entirety of the forces of evil have exhausted all of their efforts in murdering him, the true leader does not respond in kind with

more violence and anger and mockery and slander and gossip and fear and power-hoarding, but the true king on his throne, the cross, absorbs the power of evil and sin and brokenness and carries it away in his death. But his death is not the end of the story as so many had assumed. The true power lies in God's raising him from the dead to show that death and destruction do not have the final say. The way of life and light and hope is filled with humiliation and suffering at the hands of evil and sin, but the final judgment is reserved for God almighty who will stand alongside the down-trodden and unjustly abused.

“These Things” that the disciples are now witnesses of in Luke 24:28 and that I alluded to in my sermon title are the humiliation, resurrection, and proclamation of Messiah for the entire world in the person Jesus of Nazareth. When we tell people about the good news that Jesus brings to each of us, we are talking about how Jesus's experience and teaching changes the way that we look at the world forever. Jesus tells the disciples that the Messiah had to suffer. God saves us through the humiliation of Jesus and by extension through the humiliation of ourselves in modelling the way of Jesus in our world. What I mean by humiliation is that it wasn't by showing how powerful he was the Jesus brought about forgiveness and salvation, but by showing how weak and powerless he was, at least in our twisted way of thinking about power and victory. This is the craziest part of *these things* that Jesus is explaining to the disciples.

In humiliation, when we sacrifice our well-being for the good of others, when we absorb the world's evil rather than wielding it on our supposed enemies, when we take up our cross and let the powers that be treat us as worthless, that is when God's power will shine through us and into the world as it did when Jesus was resurrected. Jesus's humiliation then led to his vindication and resurrection by God almighty, showing that death and violence and hopelessness and dominance and fear and destruction would be shown for what they really are: powerless.

God has the final say when he shows how weak the empires and governments of the world are by resurrecting those who have been sacrificed on the altars of consumerism and capitalism and addiction and greed and nuclear armament and war. Resurrection is where God enters the equation as he had promised his people. God had promised he would never leave or forsake them and shows true to his promises when the tomb is empty and the disciples are wondering. Some Jews in the first century believed in bodily resurrection like what happened to Jesus, but they had always thought it would be a sign that the day of the Lord, the day of judgment had come, but God's day of judgment had again shown itself to be different than they had expected. In Jesus's crucifixion, God's judgment came down in favor of Jesus, enthroned as true king, and against the powers of empire, or put another way, against the way of empire.

Finally, the third piece of *these things* is proclamation. We as followers of Jesus then in the power of the Spirit proclaim this new way of being in the world, contrary to all of the natural ways of being and doing because in our weakness, we are strong. We proclaim that the suffering and humiliated of our world will be vindicated as Jesus was and we join Jesus in the work of resurrection. As I said in my Easter sermon, we know what a world shaped by death looks like, but the true challenge of Easter Sunday is to envision and live out a world shaped by resurrection. As Jesus tells the disciples, we are all witnesses to these things, to the humiliation, resurrection, and proclamation of Jesus the Messiah to all nations and people groups. We proclaim that the governments of this world, no matter how corrupted or self-centered or deceitful or violent, do not have the final say on who we are or who we can be in the world because Jesus has shown us that God is King. The true ruler of this universe is for the humiliated.

Unlike the story in John, Jesus tells his disciples to wait on the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will inspire them and enable them to carry this message across the world. But we are

not waiting on the Spirit today. The spirit has come and fills each of our lives and hearts when we choose to follow Jesus and dedicate our lives to his way in the world. How then do we live out Jesus's model of humiliation, resurrection, and proclamation? Who can we stand beside or stand up for today who is being trampled on by the powers that be as Jesus was trampled on by the Roman empire? How can we proclaim hope to the hopeless, those around us who cannot find meaning in their lives? How can we share the life-altering and world-shaking message of Jesus that there's another way to be in the world, and it's not what you would expect?

Let us pray. God of humiliation, resurrection, and proclamation, give us eyes to see and ears to hear your calling. Reveal to us as you did to the disciples how Jesus has fulfilled the scriptures and changed the course of history, drawing us into repentance and forgiveness. Thank you for the role that you have given as your children and followers of Jesus to be witnesses to how you are transforming us and the world around us. Give us the insight and strength to be Jesus's hands and feet in your good creation. In Jesus's name. Amen.