



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

13025 Bell Air Drive, Auburn, CA 95603 (530) 823-3916 auburnpres@gmail.com

“The Exclamation Point of God’s Plan: Resurrection Power”

Luke 24:36-49; Revelation 1:4-8

Dedication of Nicholson Cross

This year, we have been walking with Jesus as Luke’s gospel has guided us. Today, on this second Sunday of the season of Eastertide, we read the last words of “Volume One” of Luke’s writings—the part that bears his name—and look forward to reading his “Volume Two”, which we call the “Book of the Acts of the Apostles”. This portion from chapter 24, starting in verse 36, immediately follows the “walk to Emmaus” portion of Luke we read last week on Resurrection Day.

Just before we read God’s Word, let me share a word with you about the TV documentary you may have watched, or just heard about, called *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*. It came out just before Easter—interesting timing, guaranteed to rake in big bucks—with its sensational claim that the 2,000-year-old "Tomb of the Ten Ossuaries" discovered some time ago belonged to the family of Jesus of Nazareth. The show claimed a statistical study established a 600 to 1 probability against the cluster of names on the bone box—Jesus, Son of Joseph; Mary; Judah, son of Jesus—would occur by chance. And DNA samples taken from bone fragments establish that the female bones were not related to the male bones—suggesting that this was a marriage relationship, the bones belonging to a husband (named first), his wife (named second) and a son. The claim—Jesus of Nazareth was married to Mary Magdalene, and together they had a child named Judah; so, no resurrection, the whole Christian faith a fake. We can go home.

Well, now the world-famous statistician has backed away from the claim of near certainty on that combination of names, since so many people of that period had these very common names. Furthermore, another specialist in ancient apocryphal text, Professor Francois Bovon, who is quoted in the film as saying the enigmatic ossuary inscription "Mariamne" is the same woman known as Mary Magdalene - one of the filmmakers' critical arguments - issued a disclaimer stating that he did not believe that "Mariamne" stood for Mary of Magdalene at all. And the DNA evidence? DNA scientist Dr. Carney Matheson, who supervised DNA testing carried out for the film from the supposed Jesus and Mary Magdalene ossuaries, had said in the documentary that "these two individuals, if they were unrelated, would most likely be husband and wife," later said that "the only conclusions we made were that these two sets were not maternally related. To me, it sounds like absolutely nothing," [he said]. There are other problems with the film, but you get the drift. We went through the same thing with archaeological discoveries in the last century “disproving” Old Testament stories: triumphal arrogant attack on the Bible, then retractions, then confirmation of the Biblical account. And, of course, the retractions and confirmations hardly get noticed in the press. It seems you either get “the Bible is lies”, or the tabloid claims that “secret Bible predictions” lay out that this is the year Jesus comes. It makes me laugh. But then, people who don’t have much background in these things, or who haven’t developed critical thinking skills can be persuaded by this stuff, and that’s not helpful for God’s desire to reach their hearts, too.

OK, are we ready to hear from God again? Listen with me for God's Word TO US TODAY, as I read Luke 24, starting in verse 36. [text]

What a turnaround for these people! They have been hearing reports of Jesus raised to life. They have tentatively passed on those reports to others. But until now, Jesus has not appeared to them. They have heard—now they know.

Look at the turnaround of their emotions. Jesus appears with them, and they are terrified. Of course, "ghost" is the first word to come to mind. So Jesus talks them through it. He invites them to touch him—so, he's got a body you can touch! He shows them the nail holes in his hands and feet. They see all the evidence, they hear his voice; but they cannot allow themselves to believe what they see and hear. So, as a 'capper', Jesus asks them for something to eat, and he eats a piece of cooked fish—a nice touch, that Luke got to record.

But even that's not enough to break the seal on their hearts they've put there, to defend against the more pain (like the pain they felt when Jesus died at the Romans' hands). So Jesus reminds them of Scriptures they talked about before, when they were on the road together. He painstakingly connects the dots for them, between Scripture and his life and his sacrificial death as God's servant, and the victory God has won through his faithfulness. Their minds are opened—they 'get it'—and now the floodgates of joy burst open!

The resurrection is the exclamation point to Jesus' ministry and sacrifice, God's plan from the beginning of time to redeem people from the helplessness of sin ("repentance for the forgiveness of sin will be preached in [Jesus'] Name"). The reading from Revelation 1 echoes the faithfulness of Jesus, God's Christ, and shows us God's plan, fulfilled at last at the end of time, the "Omega Point". [text]

It's wonderful that we revealed the new Nicholson cross last week on Resurrection Day, and dedicated it on this day when we read this text. This cross shows the *victory crown* at the center. This is the center of God's plan. Christ earned that victory through his connected-with-God life, climaxing with his crucifixion. This theme of victory is especially prominent in John's gospel, Paul's writings, and the letter to the Hebrews—and of course, all through Revelation.

He is the firstborn of all creation. He is the bring morning star. He is Alpha and Omega. He is the Lamb Who Was Slain. He is The Faithful One. He is the Lion of Judah. He is The Ransom That Was Paid. He is the Son of God and Son of Man. With his life and death and this resurrection, he writes the exclamation point of God's eternal plan!

He won! We win!

Now, see, I would expect cheers, clapping, whooping and hollering now. I hope the quiet is just our common cultural reserve. But I wonder.

Our puny reaction to the recital of Jesus' victory could be a sign of how little we love Jesus. If we loved Jesus, we'd cheer, wouldn't we?! We'd cheer because we'd see him winning victory for us—our team that we got to join after he'd won! Nobody gets a Super Bowl ring who wasn't a member of the team throughout the season and playoffs and big game. But a Super Bowl ring is placed on our finger, as we join the Jesus Team. We know we don't deserve it, but that's the hugeness of God's grace to those who will follow Jesus (not just believe in him).

Do you know about the Jesus Team? You can only join the team by 'admitting you are helpless over sin, and that your life has become unmanageable.' Do those words sound familiar? They are "step one" of Alcoholics Anonymous and every other Twelve Step group. In those groups they'll say "alcohol" or "methamphetamine" or "emotions" or "sexual urges" or whatever, but those are only the obvious manifestations of the sickness we all have—sin-sickness. The Jesus Team should be called, "Sinners Anonymous".

The Twelve Step movement was started by two men who knew an Episcopal priest in New York named Sam Shoemaker. Together, these three created a spiritual growth program that parallels Christian discipleship. They knew from their experience that they could not, in their outreach to alcoholics, use religious language. Many alcoholics were/are filled with shame and guilt, and they knew the very words "sin" and "salvation" and all that we say so freely in church, would activate only more shame and guilt, driving the alcoholics further from God. So they vacuumed out all the religious terms, and what remained were the Twelve Steps, most of which are actions, not just beliefs.

Do you know which step people in recovery tell me is the hardest? It's this Step One—admitting we were helpless over (say, alcohol) and that our lives had become unmanageable. Why? Because our pride gets in the way. "I can handle it," we say. Our shame gets in the way. "I can't admit this in front of others; I'd die if I did." Our guilt gets in the way. "I can't take responsibility for all that I've done; it would crush me." And all of these are manifestations of a fear of death—fear of dying to the old self, the self that's filled with pride and shame and guilt. Who wants to die? Not you. Not I.

Have you admitted you were helpless over sin, and that your life lived on your own had (or, has) become unmanageable? This is the only requirement to join the Jesus Team. Staying on the Jesus team means, "working the program", taking each difficult step, dying more and more to "the old man", and taking on more and more of "the new man [or, woman]".

Do you know what the Twelfth of the Twelve Steps is? "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs." Hmmm. Looks like you don't finish the Program until you do Step Twelve. And you start practicing these steps in all of your life, not just with the "alcohol", or "pills", or the manipulative emotional—or the religious—part of your life.

Does this sound like something we talk about in church? Yes! It's evangelism. And it starts of with what they call "a spiritual awakening". Having started with admitting we were powerless over sin, we have continued to recover from centering our lives on our sinful selves; more and more we center our life on God and others. Not because we "should", but because we have discovered the truth that living with God, moment by moment, is the only sane way to live. And we want to reach out to those whose lives are falling apart, because those are the very ones who will be most eager, most desperate for help.

Have you ever been that desperate? Have you ever seen yourself as helpless over sin? If you don't have a constant desire and consciousness of God as Jesus did, you live in sin. And if you've not admitted that helplessness, have you ever really joined the Jesus Team?

If you HAVE joined the Jesus Team, how is your training—we would say, discipleship—coming? You know, every day is a new "game"—a new set of "plays" to test out your character,

stamina, and skill in living this new life. And you're part of a team, now. You rely on others, and others rely on you.

Is it any wonder why a lot of alcoholics say, "AA is my church"? THIS recovery, growth and outreach based on a spiritual awakening touches real life as we live it. It's the path to sanity, to serenity, to the peace that passes human understanding, and to effective living.

This "program" God has outlined for his "players" on "The Jesus Team", includes a nutrition program, and a disciplined rest program. The nutrition program is called, feeding on God's Word. The rest program is prayer—resting with the coach, enjoying his company, confessing our mistakes and weaknesses, and feeling His faith in us.

When each 'game day' dawns, God takes the sidelines to observe and coach. His voice vibrates silently across the field. That's one way of talking about the Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit helps us recognize it's God's voice among all the other voices around us and in the stands. God keeps sending us instructions and encouragement as we play. It's a real skill to develop an ability to play the game AND hear the coach at the same time, before and during and after each 'play'.

The object of the "game" is not to beat the other team, but to win them. We do that by being Jesus' witnesses all over the world, starting in "our Jerusalem", our "gridiron field".

Our text from Luke concluded with Jesus' Ascension, which gets celebrated on Thursday this week, I think it is. Jesus returned to his Father, and our Father, to his God and our God. But he said he wouldn't leave us alone. We are to wait for power from on high. We are to wait to go onto the field until we hear the Coach's Voice, and know it is our Coach. Then we play our hearts out with him and for him, because we love him. In leaving and returning to the Father until that Day he will return, Jesus is clearly showing us that the game is in our hands, and we will win as we listen to His voice, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The resurrection of Jesus is God's exclamation point on His plan. The point of life, for those on The Jesus Team, is to play our hearts out *every day* for and with our coach. By God's Spirit, WE get resurrection power for life, and for mission.

And one day, at the end of all our games, we, too, will wear the "victor's crown". (*point to new cross*)

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on April 15, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]