

Fear or Joy?

Luke 24:44-53

Introduction

A little more than 40 days earlier, the sky fell in. Jesus was arrested, tried, and killed. The disciples hid out of fear. Even after He had risen from the dead, there was still some uncertainty. But He was with them sporadically. They could still draw from His strength. But now, He had gone for good. He went back to the Father. What was life going to be like now? They had every reason to be **afraid**, but they weren't. The Bible says *they returned to Jerusalem with great joy*. You can't be fearful and joyful at the same time. What did they have to be joyful about?

Joy for the Future

One thing was they **knew He was coming back** and when He returned, He would take them to be with Him forever. This life, no matter how bad it gets, is not the end. As LEO THE GREAT said, *The Ascension of Christ is our elevation. Hope for the body is also invited where the glory of the Head preceded us. Today we not only are established as possessors of paradise, but we have penetrated the heights of the heavens in Christ*. Life with Him is so certain, we have it already. Exult in it; rejoice in it!

Understanding

They say that **knowledge is power**. **Verse 45** tells us that Christ *opened their minds to understand the Scriptures*. Earlier, when Jesus explained things from Scripture to them, they never seemed to get it. But now, their minds are opened; they understand. They make the connections between Scripture and what they've witnessed and see life for how it really is. We're **afraid** because of **uncertainty** in life. When we see the **truth** of Scripture, all the uncertainties of this life melt away into nothingness. We see that they don't really matter at all.

The Present Reality

Some may think I'm not taking our current situation seriously. Do I believe there is a dangerous virus going around? Yes. Do I see it as a pandemic? Yes. Do I know that people are dying from it? Yes. As a pastor, I deal with death all the time. Have you ever been to a Lutheran funeral? It's a **celebration**, not of a person's life, but of the **Gospel** and the **salvation** we have in the crucified, risen **JESUS CHRIST**. That's the **reality** of our current situation. The apostles could have been afraid of what the Jews could and might do to them. That would be taking their current situation seriously. But, remember what Paul said in the Epistle reading today, how the Father ... (Read **Ephesians 1:20-23**). The **reality** of the situation is that Jesus is Lord of all; He's in charge. And He's the Head of the church, filling us all in all.

The Father's Right Hand

Jesus is not just at the Father's side, He's at the Father's **right hand**. The right hand is the hand of power. God says in **Isaiah 41:10**, *I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand*.

All Authority

Paul says He is above all **rule** and **authority** and **power** and **dominion**. Jesus said in **Matthew 28**, in that **ASCENSION** story, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* Not only is He in charge, He hasn’t really left us, even though He’s no longer here physically.

Power

And don’t forget the promise of power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them and us. We are weak and fallen. Yet, while not strong in ourselves, we have the Holy Spirit empowering us to live this life.

The Result

The result of this present reality is **joy**. This joy leads the apostles to do two things: **witness** and **worship**. They’re witnesses because Jesus made them such. He’s also made us witnesses. We have a story to tell, the story of Christ and what He’s done on Calvary. We **worship** God because He’s the only One **worthy** of our worship. We **praise** Him for **who** He is and how **great** He is. We **thank** Him for all the **blessings** He’s given us. With so much **JOY**, how can there be room for fear?

Means of Grace

Of course, we receive all this through the **MEANS OF GRACE**. Through the **WORD** and **SACRAMENT**, we’re given an awareness of the presence and power of Jesus Christ and an understanding of this present reality. The result is that we **worship** and **witness** with **joy**. Hear the **Word** and receive the **Sacrament** and you can live in **ASCENSION JOY** instead of the **FEAR** of the world.

*May the Peace of God,
Which passes all understanding,
Keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
