

Explore the Bible: Commissions

May 10, 2021

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for May 30 focuses on Luke 24:36-49.*

There have been times when I've been startled, as were the disciples, because I felt the presence of Christ. With rarest exception, those moments of Christ's presence have occurred when something was deeply concerning, even frightening, me.

The "presence" moments always surprise me. I can't conjure them up. I can't manufacture them. They come solely as the gift of God.

I trust that Christ is present with all of us all the time. Maybe that's why Jesus asked the disciples for something to eat after telling them he was not a ghost, but real in their time and space. God, in Christ, had moved from one realm, that of heaven, to the earthly realm. It had cost him dearly. He invited the disciples to touch him so they would know that he was real and present.

It was Jesus' way of reassuring the disciples that, having left the earthly realm during his crucifixion, he had now re-entered the earthly realm for a moment. He had done so to reassure them nothing—not even death—could separate them from his presence.

Jesus was also demonstrating God moves in and out from realm to realm because he is Lord of all creation. There is nowhere, no place, where we can go that is outside God's presence. The psalmist even celebrated, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in (hell) you are there" (Psalm 139:7-8).

So, knowing their concerns, Jesus gave them a gift, the gift of peace.

“Peace be with you,” Jesus said. Then, he questioned them. His questions were meant for all of us, even now.

“Why are you troubled, and do doubts arise in your minds?” Jesus asked. Those are questions we must all face at some point in time. Then Jesus asked for something to eat, yet again proving God can move from one realm to another with the ease of an eagle soaring high on winds so strong it doesn’t even have to flap its wings. It also illustrates so beautifully how heaven is closer than we ever dreamed with only a thin veil between—a veil we soon will pass through.

Why are we troubled and doubting when Christ has proven his presence with us no matter where we may be and no matter what our circumstances?

The peaceful presence of Jesus

Many years ago, I was in my pastor’s study contemplating the end of my marriage. I felt like death walking. Fears the likes of which I’d never known assaulted my soul.

I was a pastor and we had two young sons. What would become of them if their mom and I divorced? What would become of me? How would I survive? I simply assumed, wrongly, that there would be no place for a divorced minister to fulfill his calling in any church.

The fear and anxiety was dogpiling me, weighing more and more heavily. I felt so lost, so angry, so very fearful. Entering what I now know was a full-blown panic attack, I began to weep loudly. I stood up and walked around the study, because I was in such distress sitting seemed torturous.

I picked up a chair and began slamming its legs into the floor over and over as, even in my weeping, I cried out a one-word prayer again and again,

“Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!”

I kept praying and weeping and slamming the chair until suddenly, for a brief moment, I felt the presence of the Christ to whom I was crying. I didn't see Jesus. I don't recall him saying a word. He just showed up to remind me that he would never leave me. The experience was very real.

In that brief moment, my weeping ceased. I sat down in my desk chair and, for a brief moment, rested in the peaceful presence of Jesus. The same Jesus who showed the frightened, troubled and doubting disciples.

No peace, no power

I've rarely ever told that story because it is so personal and private. Yet, this text calls it out of me. Like it or not, the death of my first marriage is part of my life's story, as is the peace of Christ's presence.

A few years later, as the divorce drew closer and closer, I phoned a mentor of mine, now a resident of heaven's realm more than 20 years. He always seemed to have the right thing to say, as he did when he made a Jesus-like promise to me. He said, “Whichever way the road turns for you, I'll be with you on it.”

He couldn't change my circumstances. He couldn't offer a way out. What he did promise was that, no matter what, he'd never leave me alone.

Before Jesus gave the disciples the Great Commission, he commissioned them with peace. The bottom line is that, before Jesus commissions us with power he commissions us with peace. Without peace, there is no power.

Even today, Jesus is commissioning us with his peaceful presence so we may have the power to be his followers.

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