

042323 – 3rd Sunday of Easter: Acts 2:14a,36-41; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35; Psalm 116:1-3,10-17

Today, we have a reading from the Book of Acts, which Luke wrote. And we have a reading from the Gospel of Luke, which Luke wrote. But so, who is Luke and who is Luke writing to? Well, Luke is the only Gentile writer of the New Testament. Luke is a physician and a close affiliate of the Apostle Paul and Luke interviewed eyewitness of Jesus Christ in order to write these books. And he is writing to a person whom he refers to as “most excellent,” Theophilus. And no one really knows who Theophilus is, but we do know that “most excellent” is a term that Paul used to address Felix and Festus who were Roman authorities and so sometimes I think the most obvious answer be the one to go with and so I suspect Theophilus to be a high ranking official in the Roman government. And if Theophilus be a High Ranking Official in the Government, Luke might be writing in defense of not only Christ but believers in Christ who were being persecuted as having a God other than Ceasar. And Luke is hereby explaining the reason for believing Jesus to be God. Interestingly, the word Theophilus in Greek means “loved by God” or “friend of God.” And so, the books written by Luke, at the level of the Spirit, are addressed to anyone who is loved by God or wishes to be a friend of God. Which means it is addressed to potential believers and believers. Jesus called his disciples friends at the last supper. And Luke writes both books as apologetics. Meaning he is writing to prove the resurrection and defend the Christian faith. Luke tells us this in Luke Chapter 1 where he tells Theophilus: “Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that *you may know the certainty* of the things you have been taught.” Luke wrote so that Theophilus, and anyone who would read this letter, may *know the certainty* of the things that have taken place with Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, in our reading from Acts today, Luke gives the account of Peter standing up in public in front of thousands of people to give an account of who Jesus Christ is. Christ is the Greek word for the Hebrew word Messiah. And so,

Peter is giving an account of Messiah in front of thousands of people. And we just talked in recent weeks about how Peter had denied Jesus for fear of being killed and how Peter with the other disciples were hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, but that after Jesus appeared to them post-resurrection and breathed on them the Holy Spirit, they became so bold that they knew they would have more peace risking their lives to speak of Jesus than to hide and not speak, and so Peter today is standing out in the open in front of thousands of Jews giving a defense of the Christian faith. And we know there are thousands because we are told three thousand people are baptized as a result of what Peter tells them today. And so, there were at least three thousand. With the population of Tombstone being 1,200 that would mean enough people to fill this sanctuary, which is only 123 seats, plus the entire population of Tombstone surrounding the church outside times three. And we know that these people are Jews because Peter addressed them as “the entire house of Israel,” saying to them today: “Let the entire house of Israel *know with certainty* that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.” We are able to know with certainty, says Peter, that Jesus is both Lord and Messiah.

But so, what does this mean? To know with certainty that Jesus be both Lord and Messiah? Lord meaning master or ruler, but Peter adds Messiah. Jesus is Lord and Messiah, says Peter.

The book of Acts and the book of Luke are written to prove that Jesus is the promised Messiah. But so, who is Messiah? Messiah is who the Jewish people had been waiting for. Messiah was predicted in scripture to be not only Lord or King, but also Prophet, Priest, and God who would come to deliver God’s people by ruling from Jerusalem forever. No one had ever fit the bill of King, Prophet, Priest, and God. Moses was a prophet who interceded for the people like a priest, but he was not King nor was he God. Moses died and was buried. David was a prophet and king, but he was not priest, and he was not God and he died and was buried. Jesus alone is King, Prophet, Priest, and God and is the only person to prove this by resurrecting. To overcome death means he is capable of reigning forever a promised. Jesus is the promised Messiah. 300 prophecies about Messiah come true in Jesus Christ. We have talked about this, and here they are. I am going to give each one of you, if you like, this list of the scriptures that point to Jesus as Messiah as you leave. I don’t know how you can read this

list of prophecies fulfilled in Jesus as Messiah and not be cut to the heart. Just as we are told that the Israelites are cut to the heart when they hear Peter speak in defense of Jesus as Lord and Messiah today. This list shows the scriptures from the Old Testament about Messiah and the New Testament Scriptures that correspond. And they are not a comprehensive list. For example, in the book of Daniel, if you have been reading the daily office readings, Daniel spoke this week about the vision given to King Nebuchadnezzar about a stone that was cut out, not by human hands, striking the kingdoms of the world and breaking them to pieces and becoming a mountain which shall rule over the whole earth setting up a kingdom that shall reign forever. Jesus is that stone. Jesus refers to himself as the stone, the chief cornerstone. Jesus is referred to as Rock and Stone in so many places in scripture that I do not have the number of references. And the promised stone that will reign forever is Messiah. And that reference from Daniel isn't even on this list, and there are many more examples of this – Jesus fulfilling imagery and narratives and events in scripture, but nonetheless this list is a good start. If you have nothing better to do this afternoon you might want to take a gander at this because it will strengthen your faith.

But the reason I am telling you all of this today is because in our Gospel from Luke today, we see that Jesus told Cleopas and another disciple on the first day of the resurrection on the road to Emmaus about the scriptures that point to Jesus as Messiah. Jesus admits right here in our reading to being Messiah saying: "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Right here, Jesus is telling these two disciples that he, Jesus, suffered because Messiah came first to suffer and then enter his glory and so he, Jesus, is Messiah. We see that Jesus comes up to these two disciples and asks what they are talking about. And they say that Jesus was a prophet whom they had hoped would be the one to redeem Israel. In other words, they had hoped Jesus to be the Messiah, the forever King. The only way to be a King forever is to not die which means you would have to be God. The Jews were waiting for God to come and reign on earth. But Jesus died and so he must be only another prophet, they say to Jesus, and then they add, yet some of the women are saying that he resurrected. This is the conversation we read about today on the road to Emmaus.

And so Jesus responds by proving to them he is the Messiah for we are told that he begins with Moses who wrote the first five books of the Bible, the Torah, and then he goes through all the prophets, which there are seventeen prophets, Major and Minor, to include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel and Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obediah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi and also the Psalms because David was a prophet, and Jesus interprets to these two disciples the things about himself in all these scriptures. On the road to Emmaus. Emmaus was approximately seven miles outside of Jerusalem and so it is a walk to about the town of Charleston if you were to head to Sierra Vista. Just before hitting the San Pedro River. It would take between two and three hours to get to Emmaus on foot. And so, on the very first day of the resurrection, Jesus appears to these two disciples and spends approximately three hours as they walk going through all the scriptures in the Torah and in the psalms and in the prophets that point to him as the Messiah. And some have said how they would have loved to have heard that sermon from Jesus. But we do not have to wonder too hard about what Jesus would have said to prove he is Messiah, because we have the scriptures. We can see and read it for ourselves; and so thanks be to God for that!

But so, who is Cleopas and who is the other disciple that Cleopas is with on this road to Emmaus? And why does Jesus appear to these particular two people right after Mary Magdalene? I mean, this is *the* day of the resurrection and Jesus chose to appear to these two disciples on the road to Emmaus as two of the first disciples to witness the resurrection. Which means Jesus prioritized appearing to these two people, and so inquiring minds would like to know who these two people are. Given it was important to Jesus to not only appear to them, but to give them the most convincing sermon that was ever given on the face of the earth proving that he is Messiah. And there are theories and so I am going to go with what makes the most sense to me. You don't have to agree, but there seems to be support for this and that is, we are told in the Gospel of John that the wife of Cleopas was one of the women at the foot of the cross. Both Catholic and Orthodox traditions believe that Cleopas was the younger brother of St. Joseph, the husband of Jesus' mother, Mary. And so, Cleopas would have been Mother Mary's brother-in-law which would explain why

Cleopas' wife was standing with Mary at the Cross. She was her sister-in-law. Which would give a high probability to the other disciple on the road to Emmaus being Cleopas' wife, Mary's sister-in-law, because they would have been returning from Jerusalem together. Which makes these two disciples the uncle and aunt of Jesus. And in my opinion, the reason the sister-in-law is not mentioned by name is because Luke is writing a convincing defense of witnesses for Theophilus and the witness of women in that culture was not considered valid. This would explain why this second disciple on the road to Emmaus was not named by Luke. In fact, Flavius Josephus who wrote the antiquity of the Jews as a contemporary of these times says of witnesses in a court of law: "But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex." This is an inequitable statement to our present-day ears, but this was part of the culture at that time... which, *clearly* Jesus did not agree with since the first witness he appeared to is Mary Magdalene making a woman the first witness to his resurrection, but here in this account from Luke we can deduce why we might not have been told the name of the second disciple.

But so why would any of this matter? Well...we have talked since Easter about how we thank God not only for the resurrection, but Christ's post resurrection ministry because even in our scripture today, these two disciples on the road to Emmaus refer to Jesus as a prophet. No one would have been convinced *for a certainty* that Jesus be God unless they had in fact seen the resurrected Lord. But once they are convinced of the resurrection because they see Jesus and are given a post-resurrection sermon on the Divinity of Jesus, by Jesus, they know that Jesus is not merely another prophet, but the promised Messiah as God.

And we are also told that Jesus goes to their house in Emmaus that night, the house of the two disciples, and has dinner with them, and in the breaking of the bread their eyes are opened to recognize Christ, whose body was broken for them. Furthermore, these two disciples then go directly to where the eleven disciples are hiding, which again would support that this is Mary's sister-in-law because only the very inner trusted circle would know where the disciples were hiding, but they make the three hour hike that same night to tell the eleven disciples the very words in our liturgy that we love to say every Easter: "The Lord has risen indeed," meaning *for a certainty*, because they had seen him and then they also add, "and he has appeared to Simon!" Which means whoever

Simon is, Simon isn't there or they wouldn't have to speak up on behalf of Simon, and so Simon must have been at the dinner in Emmaus. Jesus was only in two places in the account from Luke leading up to this - on the road to Emmaus where we are told there were two people, and then at dinner and then Jesus disappeared. And so, Simon must have been at the dinner. Some scholars think this a reference to Simon Peter, but Jesus was just at the home of Cleopas and his wife breaking bread and having dinner and if it had been Peter who was with them, Luke would have written Peter. Luke calls Peter, Peter as evidenced in our reading from Acts today, and so who is Simon? In a writing from 180 A.D., the historian Hegesippus wrote that Cleopas and his wife were the parents of Simon, Jesus' cousin. It would make sense that Simon, their son, was at dinner. This same Simon who became the second Bishop of Jerusalem after the martyrdom of James, the brother of Jesus, in the year 62. This same Simon who led the Christians across the Jordan River to Pella before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and then back again when it was safe. Simon who built the firsts Christian church on Mount Zion. It would make sense that Simon, being the son of Mr. and Mrs. Cleopas, would have been present at dinner, and that the Cleopases left Simon for his safety back at their home and went and told the eleven of Christ's appearing. And these parents would have imparted to Simon all that Jesus had said to them while proving himself to be the Messiah. And Simon went on to lead the early church under the most heavily persecuted times during the destruction of the temple by the Romans. Which would mean that Jesus appeared to this family to instill in them a faith that would lead the early Church with doctrine so sound that it could not be shaken so that the faith would not only survive but thrive *for a certainty* and be handed down to us. And that is what we are reading about today in scripture. Proof that Jesus is the Messiah. *For a certainty.*

I mean think on this: What – did Nostradamus get credited with like 10 or 11 prophecies coming to pass and they are questionable in that they are vague and so we don't know if we are even interpreting them correctly but he also got so many things wrong to boot, and Jewish prophets had to be correct 100 percent of the time or they were murdered – and so here we have in scripture 300 predictions from 40 different authors over a span of 1,500 years all saying the same thing coming to fruition in one person, Jesus Christ. You cannot

mathematically account for this. To have only 48 of the 300 prophecies fulfilled would be like 1 in 10 to the 157th power. That would be 157 zeros after the 1. I tried to find something on the internet about the earth or the universe to try to illustrate the magnitude of this number, but I cannot. I cannot find a number that represents only 48 of 300 prophecies being fulfilled – I cannot find a similitude with which to describe the magnitude. Yet some of you may have heard the analogy of 8 prophecies coming true in one person and that is 1 in 10 to the 17th power, which is far less than 1 in 10 to the 157th power, but this illustration of what 1 in 10 to the 17th power is like is set forth in an illustration of what merely 8 prophecies being fulfilled in Jesus has been likened to, and the odds are likened to covering the entire state of Texas with silver dollars two feet deep and then blindfolding a person and sending them out to pick up the one marked silver dollar on the first try. That is 1 in 10 to the 17th power and so we have no analogy for 1 in 10 to the 157th power if even 48 prophecies were fulfilled. And there are 300. Which means the probability of 300 prophecies coming true in the one person of Jesus Christ is so improbable that it can only be miraculous. God's plan for our salvation as revealed to us in scripture is assured to us with a certainty as vast as the universe. Which means the more time you spend educating yourself in scripture, the more you will realize that prophecy statistically proves it would take more faith *to not believe* than *to believe that Jesus is Messiah*. God gives you this certainty, and it is called the Holy Bible. The very Word of God. *Amen.*