

These are my words

Acts 3:12–19

Psalm 4

1 John 3:1–7

Luke 24:36b–48

Text: Luke 24:44

Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’

Introduction

In a January letter from The Scott Mission in Toronto statistics were cited from the current edition of *Who’s Hungry—2020 Profile of Hunger in Toronto*—a publication of the Daily Bread Food Bank. One shocking detail noted that “of those surveyed, 69% borrowed money to buy food, while others sold belongings or used a credit card they can’t pay off.” We all understand on a personal level that borrowing money this way is unsustainable. At the same time governments are spending and borrowing money at alarming rates in an effort to soften the financial impact of mandated lockdowns on citizens. One has to think that such practice does not bode well for a sustainable financial future.

1. In 31 AD the Roman Emperor Tiberius arrested and executed a consul of Rome named Lucius Sejanus. Sejanus, who was well connected with Rome’s financial elite, was involved in a plot to become emperor; the plot was discovered and he along with his supporters were executed. The political intrigue of that year set the stage for the financial crisis that hit Rome in AD 33 due principally to poorly chosen fiscal policies. Land values plummeted, and credit was increased. These actions lead to a lack of money, a crisis of confidence, and much land speculation. In order to meet this crisis the Emperor Tiberius founded a credit bank in Rome.

It was early April of this same year of 33 AD, in a backwater province of the Roman Empire that few cared about, a group of no-account people were hiding in a room behind locked doors for fear of being found and arrested for being followers of a man recently crucified on the charge of being an insurrection threat to the Roman Empire. Crucifixion was designed to so denigrate a human being such that no one ever spoke of the crucified person again. The hiding followers of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth weren’t about to speak of their connection to Jesus.

I ask you a question to reflect upon. Which of these two 33 AD events did you know about; Rome’s financial crisis or the locked room full of Jesus’ disciples? Certainly, in our world today, there are billions who know the story of the risen Jesus meeting his disciples in the locked room. Those who have had an education in finance may know of Rome’s financial crisis because it is an interesting case study. A further question I ask you to reflect on is this; in which of these two AD 33 events do you find hope? As you consider what is emerging for us in our ‘reopening’, where do you look for hope?

Luke’s story of Jesus’ appearance to his disciples is to stress the identity of the risen one with Jesus who was crucified and to emphasize the physical reality of his resurrection body. This

may appear to contradict the Apostle Paul's insistence on the spiritual nature of the resurrection body, but the conflict is apparent rather than real. Paul is concerned with the nature of the body in the new life after the resurrection of the dead in the Kingdom of God, while Luke is concerned with the appropriate form of manifestation of the risen Jesus in earthly conditions, and his narrative makes it plain that although Jesus has flesh and bones he is able to appear and vanish in a way that is not possible for us. Both Paul and Luke agree that resurrection is concerned with the body and not with a bodiless soul or spirit.

Our Lord knew about Rome's financial crisis as he meets with his disciples in this room where they are hiding out. In the midst of their own angst and fears and uncertainty about their future because of identification with a crucified insurrectionist he said "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." "These are my words," said Jesus. These are Jesus' words of hope to his frightened disciples. And they are still his words of hope to us in all that we face. And one of those words is this, "The messiah is to rise from the dead on the third day." Hope is to be found in what the Messiah Jesus did.

All the Apostles agree that in Jesus' resurrection appearances showing himself to have risen from the dead bodily, we have a picture of our future resurrection hope. The Apostle John put it this way, "we will be like him, for we will see him as he is." (1 John 3:2) The Apostle Paul said we are raised with a spiritual body—meaning bodily existence. (1 Corinthians 15:44) The Psalmist declares the Lord "heals all your diseases." (Psalm 103:3) In the resurrection of Jesus Christ the believer sees her future in him; fully healed even of that disease that closes out her earthly existence.

When my dear wife Valerie was diagnosed with the cancer that closed out her earthly existence this congregation joined in prayer with me for our Lord's healing grace for her. We prayed for a healing that would extend her earthly sojourn; such is the desire of love. Valerie often said that there were no bad outcomes—of course her desire was for defeat of the disease and more time together with loved ones here (she had quite a task she relished smoothing out my rougher edges). Our Lord has answered our prayers—Valerie is completely healed in accord with our Lord's resurrection promise. I have to trust my Lord that he has answered my prayers with what is best for Valerie and for me, even though the pains of parting are significant.

This hope allows us to relish our earthly life but not to cling to it needlessly. It promotes a joy about existence because the best is always yet to come. I was speaking with one of our members just after he secured his appointment to receive a COVID-19 vaccination. He commented that he was looking forward to being more confident about going to public places. He then said, in substance, "I am looking forward to meeting our Lord, I'm just not in a hurry to get there." I thought this a wonderful expression of our hope; we relish life here even as we look to that future joy.

2. "These are my words," said our Lord. A second of the words is this, "the Messiah is to suffer." The Apostle John preached, "God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:9-

10) Always keep in mind that, according to the gospel, the resurrection of Jesus is vindication that the cross was sufficient for our salvation. Note, as Jesus appears to his disciples, what he invites them to see so they are sure he really is Jesus; “Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself.” The wounds of the cross are still visible so we might know it is this Jesus who hung on the cross that is raised and is among us. The wounds remind us that at the cross God pours himself out without remainder for our sakes; this is how we are assured that God loves us.

I began this message talking about two events that occurred in 33 AD; a financial crisis in Rome and the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Where do we look for hope? One thing we know is that money and wealth do not love us; they consume us gobbling up time and energy and demanding our love—which the scripture says is the root of all kinds of evil. How different is God whose self-forgetful self-giving at the cross is his love poured upon us for the sake of redeeming us from our often self-destructive ways. He gives himself for us that he might turn us around (repent) to be embraced by his love, a love that will not let us go.

A moment ago I said to you that the resurrection assures us that the best is yet to come. The reason this is so is because at the cross our future was secured. At the cross death is defeated and our sin is absorbed in the death of the sinless Son of God. I was asked not long ago a question about the crucifix in Catholic churches with Christ still on the cross, compared to our Protestant empty crosses. There is something to be said for the crucifix because it correctly ever points to this event of Christ’s sacrifice for us.

There is much in our lives that occurs which contradicts the gospel assertion that God loves us. Fractured relationships, life-threatening illness, accidents, chronic pain, being a victim of crime—lots of things contradict the truth that God loves us. But that is what they are, contradictions and at the cross these contradictions are absorbed and seen for what they are. Who suffered greater contradiction than Jesus whose innocence of all charges was not in question? And this is Jesus’ word to us, his word of hope in the midst of our tumultuous world—the Messiah is to suffer.

3. “These are my words,” said our Lord. A third word from Jesus is this, ‘and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in Jesus’ name to all nations.’ In the death and resurrection of Jesus an amnesty has been declared. We humans, according to the gospel, have each turned away from God to go our own way. This is called sin. God created the human in such a way as to flourish within the parameters God set out for our good. All the trees in the garden of Eden were for our flourishing except one—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ‘Good and evil’ is an Hebraism that means ‘whatever the human mind can conceive.’ Since we chose to eat of this tree and go our own way, relationship with God have been severed—cut off from the very purpose of our existence. This sin (capital S) is what gives rise to sins (small s) and the disorder we often sense in our lives.

An amnesty has been declared at the cross. Our Lord’s life given for us is the cure for sin in that God’s forgiveness is secured even as the just penalty for sin is paid for us. Repentance means to turn around, turn around from our wayward ways to God and experience his forgiveness. It is the experience of knowing yourself loved by God. You know how motivating it is to know that someone loves you. In this love of Jesus for us we experience what one preacher called the

expulsive power of a new affection. It is this new affection that motivates us to turn from sin to God and know the blessing of life in walking in company with him.

In July of 1924 the unscripted remarks of English judge John Moulton appeared in the Atlantic Monthly publication. He was talking about civil society. He spoke of the domain of actions prescribed by law that are binding upon us and of the domain of free choice. In between those he spoke of the domain of the obedience to the unenforceable, the obedience to that which we cannot be forced to obey. I got thinking about that in relationship to the portion of the letter of 1 John that we read today which says, ‘those who have been born of God do not sin;’ the writer means, ‘do not continue in sin.’ The believer is ever turning to God for guidance in the pattern for his living. What keeps you honest and truthful in your social interactions? Is it not the affection for our Saviour who call us to follow him? And that obedience to the unenforceable makes civil society possible.

Mother Theresa was said to have a poster with some life aphorisms on her wall. Here are a couple. ‘If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.’ ‘If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.’ Obedience to the unenforceable. Such things sow seeds of great blessing.

4. “These are my words,” said our Lord. The fourth of these words is, “You are witnesses of these things.” Recall what Jesus said about these words in scripture—he said they must be fulfilled. God’s word fulfils its purpose. The point I note with you is that bearing witness to Jesus is the fulfilment of scripture. When you bear witness to Jesus you fulfil God’s purposes to make known the news about the world’s only true hope.

To be sure these Apostles in the room where Jesus appeared were the ones who physically saw Jesus crucified and witnessed him risen from the dead and heard him connect the dots in scripture that spoke of his death and resurrection and the glorious news of the forgiveness of sin. But think about Luke the gospel writer for a moment. He wasn’t among the disciples. He comes to faith having heard their witness. He too now bears witness making the Apostle’s witness known. This is where we stand, and these four words of our Lord are also for us.

Recently a member of our congregation told me of a conversation he had with a business associate. This business associate called him to explain why he had been a little slower than normal in returning calls; he went on to say that his wife was just diagnosed with breast cancer. On hearing that news the member of our congregation, calling the associate by name, said “I am a Christian and I will remember you and your wife in my prayers.” It is a simple witness that points to the great hope that is our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

We live in a culture that has jettisoned God or kicked him upstairs; maybe people think all they have left for hope is money and the pleasantness or help it can buy. This world desperately needs to hear the words of our Lord spoken on an April Sunday evening in 33 A.D. These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’