

"Unbelievable"
Luke 24:30-49
Sunday, May 3, 2020
4th Sunday of Easter
Service of Holy Communion

When was the last time you experienced something that was "unbelievable?" An event that occurred that seemed extraordinarily amazing?

The event that came to my mind, was Super Bowl LI (51) in 2017, when the New England Patriots beat the Atlanta Falcons in overtime, coming back from a 25 point deficit. It was one of the most exciting games I had ever seen. I was completely shocked and yet so happy to see it!

But as I thought about that question in preparation for my sermon today, I was a bit sad. Experiencing something so incredible, wasn't associated with the church. The church means so much more to me than the New England Patriots. I am sad as I consider all the amazing, miraculous events that happen in scripture and can't remember anything that amazing, that unbelievable ever happening in my life and associate it with the church.

As I shared the Gospel Lesson with you this morning, I invited you to enter into the story as I read it. I was hoping that you could begin to experience the event as Cleopas' friend or one of the "others" who were in the room with the disciples when they returned to Jerusalem.

Cleopas and his friend had just spent at least a couple of hours walking with Jesus from Jerusalem to Emmaus and they had no idea who they were talking to. It was only after Jesus joined them for the meal that they experienced the miracle of his presence.

When Jesus picked up the bread and broke it Cleopas and his friend recognized Christ. No sooner did they realize it, than he disappeared, vanished into thin air!

It's the ah-ha moment of their lives!

When they realized what had happened, they hurried back to Jerusalem to the other disciples and companions to tell them they had seen Jesus, spent time with Jesus.

As they gathered together in that upper room excitedly sharing the stories that Jesus is alive, Jesus appears again!

Jesus is popping up all over the place! The gravesite, the road to Emmaus, and now in the upper room! What is going on?

Startled, frightened, shocked, amazed, disturbed, surprised, confounded—all of these feelings rise within their souls.

But more feelings too: guilt, doubt, sorrow, shame are mixed in. Jesus knows all this. This is why he says, *"Peace be with you."*

He died on the cross forgiving them of their sin of abandoning him, denying him, doubting him, being filled with fear rather than faith. Jesus loves them and forgives them of these sins. His peace is his gift from the cross. His peace is an act of love.

Jesus' presence is unbelievable for them. They saw him die on the cross, albeit from a distance for most of them. They trusted that Joseph of Arimathea had buried him in a tomb. The women know that they helped to lay him there.

Now here he is standing in their midst. Doubts rise up...this must be his ghost! This can't be a real human being, a living, breathing person standing in their midst. Able to read their minds, Jesus addresses these fresh doubts.

Jesus invites them to touch him. To look at his hands and feet. He did go through the crucifixion and he is alive before them that very night. The doubts linger. So he eats some fish again to affirm that he is not a ghost, but living flesh.

Then as they begin to calm down, Jesus reminds them that this was all part of God's plan. That he lived, died and rose again three days later. He then does something with the entire group that he started with Cleopas and his friend. Jesus opens their minds and shares with them insights from the scriptures.

Why did Jesus do this? I mean really, open up their minds and share insights from the scriptures with them? Wouldn't it have made more sense to heal all of their brokenness, restore their youthful spirits, give them super-powers of spiritual gifts and then coach them in the days ahead on how to use them?

Nope, Jesus opened up their minds and shared insights about the scriptures with them.

Why would this be so important for Jesus to do?

I think Hannah Whitall Smith has an idea why. Hannah Whitall Smith lived from 1832 to 1911 and was a writer and speaker during the American Holiness Movement in the late 19th century, as the country was experiencing a Great Awakening.

In her book, *"The God of All Comfort"* Smith says this, "Your trouble is that you have got a wrong idea of what knowing God is...For I do not mean any mystical interior revelations."

Disciples were blessed because they had the distinct and unique experience of knowing Jesus in person. But for all the disciples who followed after them, this hasn't been the case. For 2000 years, people have come to know and trust God because of what people have shared with one another and because of the scriptures.

Smith is pointing us in the direction of knowing God in a different kind of way. She goes on to say, "The kind of knowing I mean is the knowing that comes from believing the things that are written."

"I mean that when I read the Bible that God is love, I am to believe it just because 'it is written' and not because I have had any inward revelation that it is true. And when the Bible says that He cares for us as He cares for the birds of the air, and that the very hairs of our heads are all numbered, I am to believe it just because it is written, no matter whether I have any inward revelation of it or not.

It is of vital importance to understand that the Bible is a statement not of theories but of facts. Things are not true because they are in the Bible; they are only in the Bible because they are true." (Discipleship Journal, Sept/Oct. 2004, p. 98 "Classics: Wisdom from the Past" Written That You May Believe)

Jesus took precious time with these disciples to make sure they would be grounded in Scripture in the days ahead.

How many of us are willing to believe all that is written in the Bible? How many of us are willing to take it at face value, like what Hannah Whitall Smith suggests? Not to expect some kind of inward revelation of the value or truth of what is there, but actually believe what is there just because it is there?

People struggle with believing in Christ today because they have lost touch with the Bible. In order for us to grow in our belief, we need to spend more time reading, studying, memorizing, and living out the lessons and values that Jesus teaches. We learn about these lessons by reading the Bible.

In John 1, we hear this "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." (John 1:1-2)

In order for us to know God, to know Jesus in the 21st century, we need to spend time in the Word with the Word.

That night in the upper room as Jesus visited with the disciples, *"he said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.' Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."* (Luke 24:44-45)

"We cannot understand Jesus apart from the scriptures and we will not understand the scriptures apart from Jesus." (JD Walt, The Daily Text, "The Words of God and the Word of God, Part 1" January 27, 2020)

In our culture and even in our churches, there are more and more skeptics and more and more doubts about our faith. We are losing our ties to God, and the amazing, miraculous things that God can do.

More importantly we are losing our understanding and comprehension of how much God loves us and wants what's best for us because we aren't nurturing our relationship with God through time with him and the Bible.

Jesus spent those precious times with the disciples after his resurrection, opening their minds up to the scriptures. It was that important to him. More important than healing all of their brokenness, restoring their youthful spirits, coaching them about super-powers of spiritual gifts.

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If we want to experience some unbelievable events in our life with Christ, not just watching sporting events on tv, then we need to open our minds and lives up to the scriptures, getting to know God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit a whole lot better.

Today, we are celebrating Holy Communion. You are invited to come to the church to receive the elements of bread and juice after the service. It would be incredible if everyone watching today who lives in the area came to participate. It would be unbelievable if everyone watching showed up here next month when we celebrate communion again!

Wouldn't that be an exciting, awesome, God-thing! May it be so!