

## Because He Lives

The scripture reading for today takes place near the end of the last chapter in the Book of Luke. Luke chapter 24 starts with the story of the resurrection of Jesus. This is the story we heard on Easter, how the women went to the tomb and found the stone rolled away. How they were terrified by the sudden appearance of two men in dazzling clothes. How the women told their story to the disciples, but the disciples did not believe them. Luke goes on to describe the walk to Emmaus, when Jesus accompanies two of the disciples, but the disciples do not recognize Jesus until Jesus breaks bread, blesses it, and gives it to them. Once the two disciples recognize Jesus, he vanishes from their sight. These disciples run back to tell the others of their experience. While they are all talking about what just happened, Jesus appears to his disciples. They are terrified, and think they are seeing a ghost. Jesus dispels that notion by showing his disciples the wounds in his hands and feet. Then Jesus asks for food to eat, and eats the fish they gave him. So, having established that Jesus is not a ghost, we come to the passage for today.

Verse 44 marks a change in focus. Jesus is no longer addressing the confusion that resulted from his death. He is now focusing on the church continuing his mission. Jesus emphasizes the continuity of his message with what he preached before his death. Jesus reminds his disciples (and us) that his life and ministry are a fulfillment of Scripture. Verse 44 states, “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**.” God made promises, and through Jesus those promises are fulfilled.

But this is not just a repetition of the teaching of Jesus. Now Jesus opens the minds of his disciples, to *understand* the Scriptures. Throughout the Book of Luke, the disciples clearly lack understanding. Verse 45 states, “Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures...” What Jesus told them before his death made no sense until they experienced it. In verse 46, Jesus helps them to understand, “...that the Messiah is to **suffer** and to **rise** from the dead on the third day...” is no longer a prediction, but a statement of fact. Moreover, that is only the first part of what was foretold. Jesus continues with the rest of the story in verse 47, “...that **repentance** and **forgiveness** of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to **all** nations...” which is a summary of the entire story of Acts. We know that the Apostles do indeed go on to preach repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus. We know that this mission begins in Jerusalem and then spreads out to all nations. This too, is a fulfillment of Scripture. God’s story does not end with Jesus. God’s story continues through the work of the disciples.

Jesus ties the disciples to this proclamation of repentance and forgiveness by calling them witnesses. In verse 48 Jesus states, “You are witnesses of these things.” In the Book of Acts, it is common for the apostles to be called witnesses. To equip the apostles for this work, Jesus reminds them that God promised to send a spirit from God. In verse 49 Jesus states, “...I am sending upon you what my Father promised...” and instructs them to “...stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” This will be fulfilled with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, as described in Acts chapter 2.

So what does this mean for us today?

The Hymn written by William and Gloria Gaither in 1971 beautifully captures this:

Because He Lives UMH 364

God sent His son, they called Him Jesus,  
He came to love, heal and forgive;  
He lived and died to buy my pardon,  
An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives.

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow;  
Because He lives, all fear is gone;  
Because I know He holds the future,  
And life is worth the living Just because He lives!

How sweet to hold a newborn baby,  
And feel the pride and the joy he gives;  
But greater still the calm assurance,  
This child can face uncertain days because He Lives.

And then one day, I'll cross that river;  
I'll fight life's final war with pain;  
And then, as death gives way to victory,  
I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know He reigns.

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow,  
Because He lives, all fear is gone,  
Because I know He holds the future,  
And life is worth the living  
Just because He lives.

Let us close with a prayer. Risen and ascended Christ, you surround us with witnesses and send us the Counselor who opens our minds to understand your teaching.  
Bless us with such grace that our lives may become a blessing for the world now, and in the age to come. Amen.