

Third Sunday of Easter

RESURRECTION WORDS

Luke 24:36b-48

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Analysis by Bruce T. Martin

36b [The disciples being gathered together in Jerusalem], Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 37They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. 38He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43and he took it and ate in their presence. 44Then 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." 45Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48You are witnesses of these things. [49And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."]

DIAGNOSIS: Stuck in the Old Creation

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *What Old Creation Looks Like*

Let's face it: Jesus' resurrection was problematic for the first witnesses, as also for us, not only for what resurrection is, but for what it is not. In relation to ordinary created reality, Jesus' sudden presence was startling, and he appeared like a "spirit" (v. 37, from the Greek *pneuma*), but it was not spooky or ghoulish. How does one describe life that is no longer affected by death, except that it must be spiritual or glorified? Jesus' existence and identity is a new creation, but not a dis-embodied one (dis-embodied creation is an oxymoron; see 1 Cor. 15:35-49). Luke's contorted efforts to identify and describe Jesus (his marks, his "flesh and blood" materiality, his eating) show that his new life is "really real," that death is forever behind him, and that therefore his greeting of "peace" (v. 36) and his declaration of "forgiveness" (v. 47) are real and trustworthy. From now on, nothing is real and trustworthy except in terms of Jesus' resurrection. If instead we insist that Jesus' existence and identity for us conforms to this Age—once again objectifying him to our liking, then we fail to recognize Jesus as Subject, as Lord, as Life-for-us; and what Jesus looks like is the least of our problems.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *What Old Creation Thinks Like*

Consequent to Jesus' resurrection is how we now interpret the promises of God in relation to the old creation of which we are inescapably a part. This goes to the heart of the matter and affects everything we do, think, feel, hope, and believe or trust. Regardless of how we describe Jesus' resurrection or anticipate our own, his greeting of peace and his declaration of forgiveness are not bound by ordinary measures such as cause and effect, before and after, or here and there. To think like that

now is to miss the sheer creativity of Jesus' words (v. 44; see also 24:7). Nowhere in the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms, or anywhere else, will one find (!) the messiah that Jesus turned out to be. This is not a mistake or a judgment call; it is a fact pure and simple. Such old-world thinking about Christ, even if it is called by the lofty term "promise and fulfillment," limits the power of God to the old creation and leads to the kind of one-for-one expectations that are bound to be disappointing. How often do we see people trying to "prove" that Jesus is the messiah, and miss his resurrection words altogether? This is why it takes Jesus himself to "open their/our minds" (v. 45) to resurrection reality; also why, without Christ, we in our sinful totality are stuck in the old creation (third article of the Creed).

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *God Working Death in Us*

Without Christ and his "words," everything that we are or ever hope to be, and everything that we apprehend or interpret, remains confined to our death-bound senses and our death-bound world, and we in our God-created totality are headed straight for eternal oblivion. Because there is no life in ourselves, there is simply each of us (or nothing of us) as we stand alone before God. There is no recourse to an eternal soul or persistent spirit or free will that we presume in our twisted myopia can somehow withstand or escape our sin. If all we want is to rely on ourselves (such as we are), which "kills" God for us to want it so, we will end up with nothing. That's life (such as it is) under God's judgment, until we die.

PROGNOSIS: Freed in Words of Resurrection

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *All New Things*

But Jesus' resurrection words have suddenly come upon us, and now there is no going back! He whom we crucified, and by our

denials of him continually crucify, has unexpectedly “forgiven” us by taking every sin and every death into his own body, so as to own them, thereby mediating eternal “peace” between God and us. With sin and death now behind him, Jesus “stands among us” (v. 36) as the New Creation. Thus did Christ “fulfill” the Promise of God for us (v. 44; see 1 Cor. 15:3-5). Thus did God save us from his own judgment. Thus did YHWH make Abraham a “blessing” for all nations. Thus did God establish a “new covenant” or relationship with Israel, and create in them a “new heart.” Thus did God “fulfill” his word to be our God. From now on, therefore, neither sin nor death has any power over us—God is creating all things new!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Created by His Words*

It is pointless for us to try to figure out how God creates or why he loves. It is for us simply to bask in his glory—in his faithfulness, thereby receiving Christ’s resurrection words as the glow of the new creation itself. Of this we are “witnesses” (v. 47). With our “minds opened” (v. 45) by the power of Christ’s words—faith, we at each new moment before God are receiving anew the spiritual-gift of “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (v. 47; better manuscripts attest the preposition “for” rather than the conjunction “and.” At any rate, the resurrection words of peace and forgiveness exclude any interpretation such that we have anything to prepare for them or to add to them. Our sin is all the preparation necessary.) We “witness” to Christ’s resurrection, and thus to God’s faithfulness, by proclaiming the same resurrection words that we ourselves have received. Here, receive his body and blood!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Bearing Witness-or, “Words to Die for”*

The first disciples were bathed in resurrection words, and

clothed with spiritual power (see v. 49, included above: How did that escape our pericope?) in order to make them fit for the new creation. If the resurrection has a shape or form, it is “marked” by the effects of Christ’s words of peace and forgiveness on the old creation. We can only detect that shape or form, however, by trusting in Christ’s words against all contrary evidence. This means immersing ourselves in suffering and death in order to confront them with Christ’s resurrection words. By the standards of this dying world such faith is plainly stupid; but by the “really real” standard of the resurrection, these are “words to die for.” Those who witness to the Real can expect to really suffer (no longer on behalf of ourselves, for that has been borne by Another); only now our suffering is for others-bearing words that are gift-like and promise-filled. Now our suffering is nothing less than participation in the death of Christ, and eager anticipation of resurrection in him. Though we lose everything according to the standards of the old creation, we are daily being marked by Christ’s death, and by our deaths bear witness to God’s promise “fulfilled” in Jesus Christ. The new creation begins—Now!