

Third Sunday of Easter

THE EASTER AHA: CONNECTING THE PLOTS

Luke 24:36b-48

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Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

36bJesus 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: Killing Plots

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Powerless*

The scribes and Pharisees had relentlessly plotted to kill Jesus and have gotten their way. Jesus is executed and put in a (grave) plot, apparently powerless (23:44-55). His disciples have been crushed; they are miserably despondent and despairing. Yet while they are living, (or, at least, going through the motions), they too are powerless, with all vitality sucked out of them. When Jesus suddenly appears, they are “startled and terrified” and think they are seeing a ghost (v. 37).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Promise-less*

Their fear comes from disbelieving (v. 41), from the doubts in their hearts (v. 38). They haven’t believed (trusted) either Jesus’ promises to them (that he would rise again, which he spoke frequently) or Yahweh’s promises repeated throughout the Scriptures, in “the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms” (v. 44). Most seriously, they have failed to connect their own (desperate) plights to this Jesus Messiah, i.e., they don’t “get”(understand or appreciate) that they need a crucified and risen Messiah.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Lifeless*

Not to trust Yahweh’s and Jesus’ promises is to not have them at all! Things really ARE hopeless. And the scary part is that the disciples’ lifelessness is only a portent of the permanent rigor mortis yet to come, the certain, tragic ending to their life plots (death). What they do not yet grasp, as the thief on the cross does, is that death is their “just reward” (23:41) administered by Yahweh.

PROGNOSIS: Life-Giving Plots

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Alive!*

But merciful Yahweh (the Father of Jesus) offers a far better

“plot” for the disciples than the bleak one they’ve created for themselves. This better plot involves transforming disciples into God’s own children, on par with Jesus himself! That involves giving them life, eternal life, just as Jesus is alive. How intriguing that this divine plot unfolds using the very plot meant to destroy Jesus. But then, as Jesus points out, that was Yahweh’s plot-line all along! The only difference is that no one really believed the ending – that the Messiah would be raised from the dead and that his death-resurrection would “change the ending” of their own plots (death). But look, see, he IS alive, he’s not a ghost, and he proves it by eating in front of them (vv. 42, 43).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Promise-full*

Now Jesus “opens their minds to understand the scriptures” (v. 45). Aha! They get it! But what they first get is the reality of their own bleak situation and then they see how marvelously Jesus’ death and resurrection takes care of that situation. That’s their turnaround, their repentance, their “aha.” Now they can marvel and laugh and slap their knees at this fantastic tour de force: the tragic plot they’ve been involved in has been Yahweh’s way (plot) of fulfilling His promises to bring all the peoples of the world to Him. And the catalyst for this “aha”? Four simple words dripping with forgiveness and mercy: “Peace be with you” (v. 36). Peace (shalom) is everything that God intends for His promise-trusting people.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Power-full a.k.a. Clothed with Power*

Ah, but the plot thickens! Jesus promises that His Holy Spirit will come and “clothe” the disciples with “power” (v. 49). But power for what? Power to be his stand-ins, power to proclaim “repentance and the forgiveness of sins” to “all nations, beginning in Jerusalem” (v. 47). That’s the grand finale, the final, hilariously wonderful “aha!” Believing Messiah-trusters

“connect the plots” as they realize that their very own, personal life stories (plots), like streams joining a river, coalesce with the divine plot. They (we) become supporting actors, intricately involved in Yahweh’s grand plot to gather and include “all nations” in his tender-loving embrace, shalom.