THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Luke 24:1-53

Key Verse: 5b-6a

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!”

In the previous lesson we thought of the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus. Jesus’ crucifixion was common as one of many cases, yet it was uncommon because of his complete innocence and what he said on the cross. On the cross Jesus prayed in his excruciating pain, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”, and invited one dying repentant sinner into his kingdom, saying, “Truly I say, today you will be with me in paradise.” His death was also uncommon based on how nature responded and how he died. From 12 noon to 3 in the afternoon, darkness covered the whole land, which indicated God’s wrath which was poured out on the Son to its full extent. The wrath of God was his hellish fury that should have been unleashed upon all sinners condemned to eternal hell. The Son could not bear the furious wrath of God the Father so he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” in his abandoned and separated condition from God, though momentary. Then the curtain of the temple was torn in two. And Jesus said, “It is finished” and “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” and he breathed his last. Jesus not only prayed on the cross for the forgiveness of sinners but also offered himself as a sin offering for the forgiveness and redemption of all condemned sinners. His burial was also uncommon, totally unexpected and sudden. The burial was carried by a prominent Sanhedrin member, a rich man, a secret disciple of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea, who appeared in the Bible only here at this time. Jesus was not buried by his family members or by his close followers. Jesus died and was buried on Friday before the Sabbath, so that he would be in the grave for three days. As we have observed in the words of the Bible, the court of Jesus’ trial was open not only for the Jewish world but before the whole world of that time, the Roman world. His trial, crucifixion, death and burial were certain events, with such detailed accounts beyond human understanding.

These are all wonderful works of God. Yet, without the resurrection, the trial, the cross, the death and the burial are all meaningless. His death becomes just another death. However, with the resurrection, all these events are real and full of meaning forever. There are four different accounts of Jesus’ resurrection with each writer’s own perspective, but four things are all unanimously testified: the empty tomb, the angelic message, the women’s witnessing and testifying, and the unbelief of the apostles. These are all rich evidences of Jesus’ resurrection. As we studied in Matthew’s gospel, Matthew especially recorded about the religious leaders who fabricated the fact of Jesus’ resurrection into a story that his disciples stole his dead body. The record was to dispute how silly and fraudulent the story was, that it was evidently a lie, and thus assures the fact of Jesus’ resurrection. Luke specifically wrote about two despaired disciples on their way to their hometown Emmaus and their encounter with the risen Jesus, his exhaustive Bible study with them, and them becoming living witnesses of his resurrection. Luke also briefly describes Jesus’ life on earth after his resurrection and includes his ascension. When we consider all these things, it is really impossible to deny the resurrection of Christ Jesus. One’s resurrection faith starts with a clear recognition of the fact of his resurrection through the words of the Bible. our Christian life is to be built on his death and resurrection. Our Lord risen Christ wants us to be his living witnesses of the undeniable truth.

In verses 1-7, the women who watched Jesus’ death on the cross and his burial went to the tomb. They were Mary Magdalene, Joanna (the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod’s household in Lk 8:3), Mary the mother of James/the wife of Clopas (James, one of twelve disciples, son of Alphaeus in Lk 6:15, which is a variation of Clopas), and the others with them. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lighting stood beside them. In their fright, the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!” These men were angels in the form of men (Jn 20:12). This angelic message is consistent in Matthew, Mark and Luke: In Matthew 28:6, “He is not here, he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay”, in Mark 16:6, “He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.” In John, the angels asked Mary Magdalene, “Woman, why are you crying?” implying his resurrection. No human could watch Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Impossible. Only those who are in heaven. This message of Jesus’ resurrection came from heaven through the angels. It is as the message of Jesus’ birth came from heaven through an angel of the Lord, “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:11). Two good news of great joy, of his birth and resurrection, came from heaven. Those who have ears to hear these heavenly messages on earth are truly and eternally blessed with the living hope of the kingdom of God.

Let’s think more about the angels’ message, “Why do look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen.” All those who had died and will die, great or small, belong to the dead. Jesus also died but he is the Living One, rising from the dead. He is not among the dead. Those who believe in him also become living ones, coming out of the group of the dead. God is the living God, he is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Jesus also said in John 11:25, 26, “I am the resurrection the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” Death has no mastery over the living ones. In this grace, we are to live with living faith, not deadened theoretical faith. Martha’s faith was only theoretical. So she could not have any hope for her dead brother who had been in the tomb for four days. Jesus told her to take away the stone and said, “Did I not tell you if you believe you would see the glory of God?” And then he raised the dead. It is easy to stay in our comfort zone, doing as much as we can. When our difficult situations prolong, it is hard for us to challenge again. But when we hear the resurrection message again, the Spirit prompts in us a renewed faith in the risen Christ, the Living One and have new strength to challenge in serving unchanging flock of sheep and engaging in 1:1 and the ministry of God’s word. Thank God for the message, “Why do you look for the living among the dead. He is not here; he has risen!” The Living One is not in the religious legalistic life, but he is there when we come to him in simple and humble faith in him.

Here in Luke the angels especially said, “Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ Then they remembered his words.” Jesus told his disciples of his suffering, death and resurrection repeatedly, at least in three different occasions written in the Bible (Mt 16:21, Mk 8:31, Lk 9:22; Mt 17:22, Mk 9:31, Lk 9:4; Mt 20:18-19, Mk 10:33-43; Lk 18:32-33). The women did not hear this teaching of Jesus directly but overheard it. Yet they remembered his words when the angels spoke to them.

According to Matthew, these women met Jesus on their way to see the disciples. Jesus said to them, “Greetings” (Mt 28:9). But Luke did not write about it. Probably, it was because as for the women, remembering the words of Jesus was enough to believe in his resurrection. They told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others, surely concerning the empty tomb and seeing a vision of angels and the angels’ message of Jesus rising from the dead and being alive. Interestingly, only Luke wrote about the women delivering the message of Jesus’ resurrection to the Eleven and all the others and Luke commented that they did not believe the women because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Maybe the message was not logical and the women were too emotional out of overflowing joy. One can think that men would be more logical in delivering such a message and that the disciple would believe other men, but in John’s gospel, Thomas did not believe his fellow man’s testimony. Anyway, at this point, no men had such a blessing, for they were not there at time of his crucifixion and death except John and no man even could think of seeing his burial place and going to his tomb on that day out of great fear of the Jews. But the women were present in all such times. In fact, the message of Jesus’ resurrection does not make any sense logically: How could the dead be raised? Verse 12 says, “Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.” Despite the evidence of the empty tomb, the neatly folded and arranged strips of linen, and the women’s testimony, Peter’s mind could not grasp the resurrection of Jesus. Here, Peter’s response supports the truthfulness of Jesus’ resurrection, eliminating the possibility of the body of Jesus’ being stolen by his disciples of whom Peter was the top.

In verse 13, the scene changes. It says, “Now/behold that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.” Among the Eleven plus disciples’ group, two of them were going home heartsick, devastated, and utterly confused, and the Passover ended the day before. They were part of the group that heard the testimony of the women and didn’t believe it and thought it was nonsense. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. They were buddies of failures in life.

Then what happened? Verse 15 says, “As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them.” They were plain, simple, humble, obscure followers on a dusty road to a village, which we don’t know about except that it was 11km from Jerusalem and the ruins of which do not exist. It is truly the marvelous grace of the risen Jesus in his humbleness. In that time and culture, it was not uncommon for a stranger to come up alongside and carry on a conversation. However, as for Jesus, he was in form and face glorified. And yet he was not alien; he was human. At his coming, they were not shocked. They were not surprised by his form or appearance. May we come to know that our risen Lord is walking with us on the dreary road of our lives as we do not lose our focus on him. But they were kept from recognizing him. It was perhaps because they were too despaired and sorrowful to recognize Jesus walking along with them. Yet, we know that nobody knew who He was until He disclosed Himself to them. We see God’s intention was that they might know the risen Christ based on the Scriptures first.

Let’s see how they could recognize Him. Jesus asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” This is how Jesus began the conversation with them. It is by raising a simple, relevant question. At this question they stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, ‘Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?’” Cleopas is the male form of Cleopatra, a kind of a shortened version of Cleopatras. Cleopas was probably well known to the church by this time. Luke wrote this gospel in 60 or 61, which was nearly thirty years after these events had happened. Cleopas seemed to be saying, “Everybody knows. Are you the only person who doesn’t know what everybody’s topic of conversation has been about?” “What things?” Another simple question from Jesus.

They replied, speaking all about their concern and agony: “About Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” Here we notice their partial view of the Messiah. They knew that Jesus was a powerful prophet in word and deed, recognized by God and all the people. When Jesus was crucified and died, he was not their expected Messiah anymore. God’s promised Messiah had to be victorious at any situation, liberating Israel from occupation by the Romans. They expected a kingdom redemption. They knew that the Messiah would be the Redeemer who would redeem his people by paying the price. But they did not know that the payment would be the very life of the Messiah. In their own concept of the Messiah, no testimonies of his witnesses could get into their minds.

How did Jesus help them? In verses 25-27, it says, “He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

The risen Jesus went through the whole Scriptures with them on that road. Most probably, Jesus started with Genesis 3:15 that God promised to send a Saviour through the offspring of a woman and he would crush Satan’ head, being wounded on his heel, which implied his death and resurrection. We also remember that receiving Noah’s sacrifice after the flood, the LORD revealed his long-range plan to solve man’s sin problem not through a Flood-like judgment but by sacrificing his Son as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (Ge 8:21). We cannot miss God’s command to Abraham to sacrifice his son, his only son Isaac as a burnt offering on the region of Moriah. In that thunderous command, God had in mind to sacrifice his One and Only Son in that very place around 2000 years later (Ge 22:2). In Exodus, the blood of the Passover lamb saved the Israelites whose houses were painted by the blood. This Passover Lamb points to Christ, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:7, “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” In Leviticus the five offerings, the burnt offering, the grain offering, the fellowship/peace offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering, all point to Jesus. And there was The Day of Atonement, when the high priest entered the Most Place once a year with the blood of the animal sacrifice for the atonement of man’s sin. It had to be repeated year by year, but Christ entered The Most Holy Place by his own blood once for all. And numerous animals in the sacrificial system were killed in anticipation of the Son of God being killed for man’s sins. In Numbers, the bronze snake, which Moses put on a pole, saved those who were bitten by the deathly poisonous snakes as they looked upon it. This bronze snake refers to Jesus, as Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:14, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” In Deuteronomy 21:22 it says, “…anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse.” And 27:26, “Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.” Christ was cursed for our sins of not being able to keep the law of God as Paul said in Galatians 3:13, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”

The Prophets have two parts, the former prophets starting from Joshua throughout all the books of history and the latter prophets from Isaiah to Daniel, the major prophets and minor prophets from Hosea to Malacai. In the book of Joshua, Rahab and her family members were saved from the destruction of Jericho by tying a scarlet cord in the window, which also refers to Jesus (Jo 3:18, 21). In the book of Ruth, Boaz, a kinsman-redeemer, married Ruth, the daughter-in-law of Naomi, who lost her husband and two sons and so became very bitter in life. Through this act of kindness (checed), Boaz indeed redeemed an otherwise bitter and miserable family to become a royal family of king David after three generations. Boaz indicates our Redeemer Christ Jesus, who through his redemption brought us into his family and became the firstborn among many brothers, not being ashamed to call the redeemed ones brothers (Ro 8:29; Heb 2:11).

In Luke 24:44, Jesus also mentioned Psalms: “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” In Psalm 22, it is written, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (1)…they have pierced my hands and my feet (36), and in Psalm 16, “…nor will you let your Holy One see decay” (10). And in Job 19:25, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.”

The most vivid description of Christ’s suffering and glory is written in Isaiah 53: “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering…Surely he took up our infirmities and carried out sorrows…he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed…After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.” As we also studied, the new covenant mentioned in Jeremiah 31 is sealed in the blood of Christ (Jer 31:31). In the book of Daniel ,a rock, cut out not human hands, struck a dazzling enormous statue with head of gold head, chest and arms of silver, belly and thigh of bronze, legs of and the feet mixed with iron and clay. This was a vision of the coming kingdom of Christ after all the kingdoms of the world are destroyed – the Babylonian kingdom, Medo-Persia kingdom, Greece kingdom, the kingdom of Rome and the final kingdom of the Anti-Christ (2:45). We also see the coronation of Christ in 7:14, “He was given authority, glory and sovereign power…His dominion is an everlasting dominion…”. And God’s decree of seventy sevens in Daniel chronologically points to Christ’s death after seven sevens and sixty sevens and the future glory after the final one seven (9:24). What a glory of Christ depicted in the book of Daniel! The story of the prophet Jonah, who was in the belly of a huge fish three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17; Mt 12:40) and was vomited onto dry land, picturesquely depicts Jesus’ burial and resurrection. In Zechariah it says, “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (9:9), “So they paid me thirty pieces of silver (11:12), “They will look on me, the one they have pierced” (12:10), “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” (13:7) and “The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name” (14:9). These all refer to the Christ regarding his suffering and glory.

Here in verse 28, it says, “As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther.” In this act, Jesus was wise to let them take initiative for further fellowship in the words of the Scriptures. At this, they urged Jesus strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. What went on further? When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. We know that this was not a communion, for there was no wine offered. Interestingly, it seemed that Jesus prepared a simple and familiar meal, since they were so enthusiastic to listen to Jesus. Verses 31 and 32 say, “Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’” The risen Jesus did not perform any miracle before them to convince them that he was alive. He explained the Scriptures and had the fellowship with them in a very ordinary and familiar way of eating together. Thank the risen Jesus who opens the Scriptures to us. In this grace, our hearts may burn more and more with enthusiasm to hear from the Lord, not growing cold in habitual study.

Verse 33 says, “They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem.” It must have been a dark night, around 9am. On that same day, they turned back right away to the place they had left in despair and disappointment. There, they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.” Again thank and praise Jesus for his resurrection. We are to know that the resurrection of Christ Jesus is both historical and Scriptural. Paul also said in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, “…Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” And also it would be personal. Romans 10:9 says, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” At that time confessing this Jesus was a matter of life or death. May we believe Christ’s resurrection in our deep hearts and confess it before anyone in the world and be assured of our salvation. May we also practically live more and more by faith in the risen Christ who is with us in our day-to-day life. May we also be able to offer such a Bible study as Jesus did to even the Jewish and Muslim students at U of T, who are familiar with the Old Testament.

In verses 36-43, “While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.” Here we learn the importance of the bodily resurrection. Jesus’ resurrection body is exactly like our physical body but with no vulnerability to sin and not limited by time and space, capable of moving, touching, seeing, eating, smelling, singing, dancing, etc. We will have a glorious resurrection body just like Jesus’. It is as Paul said in Philippians 3:21, “He…will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” The resurrected do not just float around in the universe.

What is written in verses 44-53 seems to be the record of the brief summary of what Jesus did during the forty days after his resurrection, particularly at the end of the forty days. He said to them, “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.” Again, we learn the importance of understanding the Scriptures through our lifelong Bible study with the Lord. Jesus told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead and on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” Repentance and forgiveness are teachings from Scripture, the Old Testament. When Adam sinned against God by disobeying God’s command, the first thing God did was call to the man, “Where are you?” in expectation of Adam’s repentance, for God was willing to forgive. In the temple, Solomon offered his prayer to God, especially for the forgiveness of the sin of his people, “When you hear, forgive” (1 Kings 8:30), “hear from heaven and forgive the sins of your people” (8:34), “hear from heaven and forgive the sins of your servants” (8:36), “hear from heaven. Forgive and act” (8:39), “forgive your people…forgive all the offenses” (8:50). But the forgiveness is based on Christ’s offering his life-blood on the cross, as Hebrews 9:22 says, “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” Forgiveness is most urgently needed for all mankind. This is the reason Jesus prayed on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Repentance and forgiveness are to go together. Paul said to the elders of the church in Ephesus in Acts 20:21, “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”

Those who believe in Christ’s suffering and resurrection are to preach repentance and forgiveness as his witnesses, for the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins has been established through Christ’s death and resurrection. You and I are included in the list of being witnesses of Christ’ death and resurrection. For this Jesus wants us to be clothed with power from on high, the power of the Holy Spirit. Verse 49 says, “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power form on high.” Thank God that the Holy Spirit dwells in the heart of believers. Yet, we can pray more and more for the filling of the Holy Spirit. Again we remember Acts 1:8, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses…”

In verses 50-53, “When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.” It is significant that when Jesus left and ascended to heaven, he assured of every spiritual blessing for those who have repentance and forgiveness through faith in Christ Jesus.

Thank and praise God for the resurrection of Christ Jesus, which is historical, biblical and very personal. May we live with the faith in the risen Christ who is real each day and live as his witnesses, witnesses of his death and resurrection though preaching repentance and forgiveness in the power of the Holy Spirit.