

³⁶ While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.

³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹ 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."

⁴⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹ And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate it in their presence.

⁴⁴ 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." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

In a way, the disciples reaction when Jesus appears is understandable. I mean, put yourself in their shoes: Someone you love dies. If three days later, that same loved one appears to you, you'd probably be scared, too. If it happened like it did for them, in a room where the doors were all locked and the windows all shut, you might even think it was a ghost, like they did!

In a way, it's understandable...but in another, it's not. After all, Jesus had told them (and how many times?) that all this would happen – that he'd suffer, die, rise again. In fact, he said it so often and so openly that even Jesus' enemies knew about it. Remember the guards they had Pilate post outside the tomb? Why did they put them there? He said he'd rise on the third day, and they didn't want the disciples stealing the body and faking a resurrection! Even Jesus' enemies knew about it. So it's not like the disciples didn't hear or remember that Jesus said it. It's that they doubted. They didn't believe Jesus' words.

Or anyone else's, for that matter. It's Easter evening. Do you know how many people in that room have seen the risen Jesus by now? At least six. Two women who went to the tomb saw him as they ran back to the city. He appeared to Mary Magdalene – she even grabbed his feet. At some point, he appeared to Simon Peter, and then he appeared to two of them on the road to Emmaus. And all those people have shared the news.

And yet, as they're talking about it, Jesus himself shows up. And what's their reaction? Not, "Ah! It's true, he's alive!" But, "Ah! It's a ghost!" It's no wonder Jesus rebukes them. **Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?**

And yet, couldn't he just as well ask us the same question? You've been Christians for a while. There are things that Jesus has told you over and over again in his word. But for all he's repeated them, we still struggle to trust them. Struggle with doubts.

How many times and in how many ways has Jesus told you you're forgiven? But here's another question: How many of you never struggle with feelings of guilt? Maybe over some big screw up in the past. Maybe some sin you struggle with in the present. He says my guilt is gone, but the fact I still carry it shows I'm not so sure.

Jesus says prayer is powerful and effective, and he answers each one. Then why is it that we pray so little? Why is it that even when our prayers do go up, there's often a "not sure if this'll do anything" attitude in our hearts about it? Jesus promises to provide our needs, but why is it that when my resources run out, I still worry? Because we doubt.

Go down the list of promises, and for each one, there's a doubt in our heart. And maybe that's even true of his biggest one: Resurrection – both his, and ours. I mean, science says it's impossible. And we've never seen it happen, either. Isn't there a gnawing doubt, fear in our hearts that maybe death was the end with Jesus? That his disciples just wanted it to be true, they were seeing things? That it's too good to be true - that death will be the end of us, too?

"Why these doubts?" Jesus says to us. Do you know the ugly answer to that question? There's a part of us that refuses to take Jesus at his Word. A sinful nature in us that's willing to believe anything – even ghost stories – anything but what God says.

So, isn't it amazing how Jesus deals with the doubting? Jesus looks into their hearts and that's the ugliness he sees. He knows their doubts. But instead of heading to heaven to be rid of them, he comes to them. Locked doors won't keep him away; he uses his power as God to appear right into their midst. And what's the *first* thing he says to them? It's not, "Why didn't you believe me?" It's one word: "Peace." **Peace be to you.**

It's his word to you this morning. "Peace." Yes, Jesus knows all the doubts you have, all the ways you fail to trust him. But it's not just because he can see into your heart. It's because he carried every last doubt to the cross, along with the rest of your sins. And there he was punished for them all and paid for every last one. All so that he could say to you this morning, "**Peace.** God is no longer angry with you, and neither am I! Peace, because my death took your sins away."

But that's not all he says. After all, if he loved us enough to die in order to wipe our doubts from God's record forever, don't you think he loves us enough to wipe them from our hearts right now, too? And that's what he does.

"Look," Jesus said to them. "Look at the marks the nails left in my hands and my feet. I'm no look alike or impostor – it's me, the same Jesus you saw nailed to the cross!" Then he draws closer. "Touch," he says. "Touch me and see that I'm no ghost or spirit. Spirits have no flesh and bone like this! I physically died, but now I'm physically alive." And when they're still not believing it because it seems just too good to be true, Jesus gives them even more proof:

“You got anything to eat?” And they give him some fish and he chews it and swallows it in front of them. And finally the doubts start giving way to faith: It’s really Jesus. He’s really alive. He’s really our Savior.

Jesus drives away our doubts. This wasn’t disciples who wanted to believe it so bad they hallucinated it. It’s disciples who refused to believe it, until a gracious Jesus gave them overwhelming evidence and drove their doubts away. And here’s the thing: God inspired the men who saw and touched to write it all down for you, so that Jesus could drive away your doubts, too. So you can know and believe. So that you can say it with not a question mark, but an exclamation point: Christ is risen INDEED!

I know, sometimes we wish we could do what they did. See Jesus with our eyes. Touch him with our hands. But do you realize that the evidence Jesus has given you in his Word is even more reliable than seeing or touching? Your senses can deceive you, but God’s Word never does. Your bible is more reliable than your senses. More reliable than your logic and experience and feelings. More reliable than the best evidence science can muster, because all of those things can be wrong. But God’s Word never is.

That’s where Jesus directs his disciples next. He knows soon he’ll return to the Father; they won’t be able to see or touch much longer. They need to learn to depend on God’s Word. So Jesus shows them how dependable it is: ⁴⁴ **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.”** ⁴⁵ **Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.** ⁴⁶ **He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”**

Jesus walked them through their bible, showing how every promise God made about him came true. And we can do the same. How 700 years before it happened Isaiah promised the Savior would come from David’s line, be born of a virgin, suffer and die to win us peace – *and it happened like God said.* How 1000 years before it happened, David in the Psalms described it in detail: He’d be betrayed by a close friend, his enemies would mock him, his hands and feet would be pierced, they’d cast lots for his clothing, not a bone of his would be broken...*and it happened, just like God said.* How both Isaiah and David promised after his death, he’d see the light of life...his body wouldn’t see decay...and *he rose, just like God said.*

Are you starting to see the theme? Jesus points us to his word so you can see how perfectly God keeps his word. So that you can know that when Jesus says to you your sins are forgiven, it’s just as God says. So that you can know without a doubt that when he says your prayers are powerful and he’ll provide for you, it’s a fact. So that now and in your death you can know that when Jesus says you will live and you will rise, it’s unbreakable, unshakeable truth.

But not just so that you know it. So that you trust it. Jesus points them and us to his word because that’s how he keeps driving doubts out of our hearts. Because it’s God’s power to give us more and more trust. The Holy Spirit works through it, as he did for the disciples that

first Easter, to overcome our unbelief, drive out our doubts, and give us trust that it's all true, and it's all for me.

That Christ is risen INDEED...which means you are forgiven INDEED...and you will INDEED be raised to life everlasting with him...that he will INDEED keep all his promises to you until that day comes. May Jesus continue to drive out your doubts through his word until it does. Then you'll finally get to see with your eyes, and touch with your hands, in heaven. Amen.