

“The Power to Open Our Hearts”

Luke 24:36-53

Jesus left this world. While he blessed them, he parted from them. He left having prepared his disciples to continue his work of his Father. How did he prepare them? First of all, he proved to them that he was alive. Then, he opened their hearts to understand the Scriptures, which at that time was the Old Testament. Lastly, he promised them that they would be clothed with power from his Father God in heaven.

Jesus left this world and his disciples 40 days after he rose from the dead. It's called "Ascension Day." "Shotenbi" in Japanese. Ascension Day is this Wednesday.

According to the verses that Iori San read, Jesus did at least three things before he ascended into heaven. 1) He appeared to his disciples and showed them that he was alive, that he had risen from the dead. 2) He opened the hearts of his disciples to understand the Old Testament and that his resurrection and the forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed to all peoples. 3) Jesus told them to wait for the promise of the Father. "Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came.

So today, I want to focus on these three things that Jesus did to prepare his disciples for his ascension to his Father. He proved his resurrection to his disciples. He opened their hearts to spiritual truth. He promised them power from on high to be his witnesses.

During the 40 days following his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples several times. He appeared to Mary of Magdalene and to another Mary. He said to them in Matthew 28:10, "Do not be afraid; go ahead and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

In Matthew 28:16,17, it says, "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted."

In John chapter 21, Jesus appeared to seven disciples who had gone fishing. There he made breakfast for them, and after that he reinstated Peter to the ministry by telling him, "Take care of my sheep."

And last week, Jesus appeared to the two disciples who were on their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Their hearts burned within them as they heard this.

This is spiritual renewal. We see it again in today's verses. Verse 36 says, "Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, 'Peace to you!'" This is the ultimate greeting of peace. This is true "shalom."

In general, "Shalom" means health and safety, but that isn't all. It also includes reconciliation with our Creator God. Through Christ and his shed blood on the cross, our sins are forgiven and

Joel Lowen

our relationship with God is restored. And shalom also includes reconciliation with people. Wars and hostilities and tensions are ended. It means that we have peace within emotionally.

Psalms 4:8 says, "In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."

When we give greetings of peace to each other, let's think a little bit more about what it really means. Our relationship with God and our relationships with each other are restored.

But back in Luke 24, we see that the disciples were not experiencing shalom. Verse 37, "But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit."

Even after Jesus appeared to them, why did they still not believe that it was Jesus who had risen. In verse 38, we see that Jesus thought the same thing. "And he said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?'"

But Jesus did not get angry. He showed them his hands and his feet. There were the scars from the nails on the cross. He said in verse 39, "Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

Verse 41, the disciples were joyful, even though they could hardly believe it was true. It says, "They still disbelieved for joy and were marveling." But Jesus wasn't finished proving himself to them. Verse 42, he took a piece of fish, and ate it in front of them.

I'm joking, but I like to think that this fish is salt-fried mackerel. Why is that? Well, there is a story behind it.

Every week I eat lunch together with the guys I play tennis with. We often go to the Japanese restaurant called Yayoi. I like to imagine that Jesus is there too. These men are not really interested in Christianity, but one of them has been baptized in the Catholic church. Recently, another man asked him, "Have you read the whole Old Testament?" The man who was baptized in the Catholic church said, "No, I haven't." The man that asked him that said, "Well, I have, and I have a problem with the book of Joshua. Why were so many people who didn't believe in God killed?" My response was: "Many people have that question." And I didn't say it till later, but then I did say, "Don't just stop with Joshua." And then it occurred to me to say, "Jesus Christ opened the hearts of his disciples so that they could understand the Old Testament."

Well, because their hearts are hard, I don't they understood what I was saying. But actually, the disciples were once like that too. In fact, we were once like that. And some of you listening right now are like that. If Jesus hadn't appeared to you, you would not have faith. If he hadn't opened your heart to understand the Scriptures, you wouldn't have faith. Our faith is a gift through Jesus.

The Bible says that Jesus is standing outside the door of your heart knocking. If you hear his voice and open the door, he will come in and eat with you. What does it mean that he will eat with you? In the message last week, we had these verses, Luke 24:28-31. "So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke

Joel Lowen

it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight."

To eat with Jesus means to invite him to say with you at your house. It means to ask him to come into your heart. If you ask him to do that, he will come in and fill you with his power and your eyes will be opened. Your eyes will be opened to understand the Scriptures.

Jesus wants us to invite him in. He can come in just like he did here into the room where the doors were locked. But he does want you to invite him into your heart.

Do you recall the picture where Jesus is standing at the door knocking. Something you may not notice is that there appears to be no doorknob on the outside. Therefore, we need to open the door so that he can come in.

Jesus showed them that he was risen. He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And then he promised them power from on high. He said in verses 46-49, "Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Jesus not only gave them the assurance that he was alive. He not only opened their hearts to understand the Scriptures. He promised them power to be his witnesses. He told them to wait in Jerusalem for that power. They would need his power to continue his work. They would need special power to proclaim his resurrection and repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus promised them that power.

Today we have that power if we believe in Jesus, if we invite into our hearts. Unfortunately, even though we have that power, we can reject it. We don't welcome Jesus anymore. Many of us know people who once believed in Jesus, but now are rejecting Him. They believed. They were baptized. But now they don't go to church. They don't believe anymore. What should we do? Wait for the Holy Spirit. He will come.

When I was preparing this message, I experienced anxiety about it one night when I went to bed. I prayed, "Lord Jesus, come. Lord Jesus, come," over and over again. I went to sleep and when I woke up, I had an incredible sense of peace come over me. The Holy Spirit comes even now, every day, to renew our faith.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, come. Lord Jesus, come. Thank you that you did come, that you live. You live in our hearts. Your word is alive. Fill us with it. Open our hearts to understand it and to love it. Lord, show yourself to us again. Give us faith to believe again. Please show yourself to us everyday.