

# ***PRAISE INTERNATIONAL***

## ***FACTS OR FAITH***

### ***LUKE 24:36-48***

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Good Morning

Prayer Needs

At 6:20pm on Feb 22 of this year I was standing watching the sunset at St. Pete beach...with tears flowing down my cheeks. Not because of the beauty that I was seeing with my eyes but the beauty that was unfolding back home. Neice had just called me to say I am on my way to the birthing center and Holly said its not going to be long! Literally minutes later I got a text at 6:45 pm 'He is here'. By now I was in my brothers condo cleaning dish's but when I saw the text I had to step into their bedroom and call Denise - when she answered I could not hold back the tears and for a minute I wept without control. Yes these are amazing moments of joy to share as a parent but this was something I had held differently in my heart. Just a year ago I had prayed with Holly before she went in for a surgical procedure as they began to move towards attempting to have another child after their little miracle baby Evelyn. Shocked to discover they were again pregnant it was a very difficult pregnancy for Holly with some added angst concerning how Henry was developing in the womb - a lot of prayer and concern.

Just a short time later I walked back to the beach to capture this moment - that was profoundly powerful. Again not simply because of its beauty but it was a moment I don't think I will forget when I was so deeply aware of the kind generous heart of God. Now I was a bit hesitant to share this story because I don't want this to just sound like the proud Opa moment - something far more profound was happening for me - I was deeply aware of this was a holy moment. His birth was a gift that did not come purely as a result of biology or even infertility treatment - I was face to face with the generous heart of God.

I am sure that many of you could share stories like mine moments when you were so aware - so awake - so present that something beautiful had touched your life that seemed to transcends time. The moment I awoke from emergency surgery in 1987 - moments that we are deeply aware that what has just happened had nothing to do with your efforts. I have had friends tell me of moments of encounter with God's profound peace, love or forgiveness - that leave us in tears and in what the scripture calls 'awe'.

You see those are the moments that go beyond reason and logic and bring us face to face with the Love of God. Moments something no someone has touched our life - nope its not the result of just reading a set of instructions or holding to a set of beliefs its when our heart and life are opened to the Divine life of God - and we realize the presence of Christ with us! Something beyond just the facts of the day but something deeper that reveals resurrection life among us.

In our text Luke tells us a powerful account of the disciples who are deeply aware and living from the facts to those who begin to actually experience resurrection life. By this I mean more than a historical fact but a recognition of what means - the risen Christ is among us!

Cleopas and his companion are telling the other disciples how Jesus appeared to them on the road to Emmaus when Jesus, again, shows up out of nowhere, interrupting their conversation. "Peace be with you," he says. They see him, they hear his voice, but they don't recognize him.

Because they are living from facts....

They "thought that they were seeing a ghost." They know Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. They know dead men don't come back to life. This can only be a ghost, a spirit without a body. The tomb is open but their minds are closed.

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***And the secret is simply this Christ in you!  
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Col 1:27b JB Phillips***

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Think about this - their Facts are correct....

- Yet they are unable to recognize who is standing among them.
- They are continuing to live, think, and understand by the natural order.
- They have separated heaven from earth....they are living in the real world...God is distant....

**Please don't miss this....Facts did not birth Faith...**

- More than one of them had been to the empty tomb....
- It's not enough that the tomb is empty. It's not enough to proclaim, "Christ is risen!" It's not enough to believe in the resurrection.

*At some point we have to move from the event of the resurrection to experiencing the resurrection. Experiencing resurrected life begins with recognizing the risen Christ among us. That is the gift of Easter and it is also the difficulty and challenge described in today's gospel.*

Verse 45 Luke states this: *...Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.*

**What a verse! What a reality!**

Jesus comes to men who have seen an empty tomb but when they see Jesus believe they have seen a ghost!

**And here is the invitation of faith - to encounter the resurrection of Jesus as more than just a fact to defend but a reality that shatters our expectations of how we have experienced life.**

- In the resurrection Jesus reveals that the life of God is not controlled by human limitations.
- Yet it is revealed in a human body and in real human experiences.
- 2 of these disciples had already seen Jesus on the road to Emmaus and 'there hearts were burning'....but now they are startled, frightened - is it a Ghost?
- No I am not a ghost I have flesh and bones - do you have something to eat?
- Ok that's the natural order but now Jesus reveals a new order. A place where the life of God is revealed in the 'natural order'. The resurrected body of Jesus has forever bound to humanity and divinity. He has a real body.
- **Yet in the resurrection it is not subject to natural laws - its a new reality – place where Heaven is revealed on earth.**
- **Everything has changed and that beloved is good news!**

Here is part of the invitation of our text today beloved - what we proclaim in the resurrection is more than a historical fact but a recognition of what it means - **the risen Christ is among us!**

- There is a new order at work where God has come to reveal what started in a Garden a place of beauty, communion, community, abundance and life that we could not bring on our own.
- Its the moment of standing on a beach and realizing something has happened far beyond my control and 'He opened their minds'....and He opened my mind to see a new reality.
- **Christ among us - forgiveness, peace, hope, love - life that I did not create but He has freely given – this is called the Kingdom.**

**The Kingdom touching our lives and our world in real time in real ways this is the walk of faith beloved.** This speaks to how often we like the disciples find ourselves startled frightened and aware of facts but unsure...because we feel small and alone in a crowd of uncertainty – and God feels distant.

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Read this past week from Brian Zahnd

*History often unfolds in ways that are as awful as they are inexorable. Thus it behooves us to remember that we're not called to change the world. (We cannot bear that kind of pressure.)*

*Our task is more modest: to simply be that part of the world already changed by Christ. This is enough.*

**I have been thinking a lot about what it means to live engaged in a life of faith over religious facts:** truth be told we all have been like Jesus friends retreating into closed rooms rehearsing facts...when His invitation is to live surrendered in faith to a new reality - Christ among us!

I recently read a definition of faith by Brene Brown that bears repetition:

*Faith is a place of mystery, where we find the courage to believe in what we cannot see and the strength to let go of our fear of uncertainty.*

**Beloved faith is not about certainty of outcomes its about trusting the resurrected Christ among us - now...even when it feels the opposite - its trusting His love is more powerful than my anxiety and fears and everything else that hell is attempting to usher into my life and the lives of those around me. It is choosing to live wholeheartedly in the ways of Jesus in the face of uncertainty. When the facts want to drive us into a closed room - we are invited to live wholehearted – He is with us.**

- How do we do that in a world that almost demands that we take sides and ‘hold our ground’?
- Here is a thought maybe there is a different space for us to inhabit than trying to challenge our family and friends about which political party needs to be supported or opposed. But that I could live knowing the resurrected Christ is in our midst and choosing to live surrendered to His ways could reveal a **new reality - called the Kingdom of God.**
- A place where I love my crazy neighbor and begin to see how much we actually need one another.

Last week my son sent me an article written by a Jesuit Priest Rev. John Dear the director of The Beatitudes Center for the Non Violent Jesus. [The Beatitudes: Manifesto of Nonviolence](#)

*“Blessed are the rich, the reign of this world is ours.” Empirically the rich rule the world, and the rest suffer and die, often in misery. But Jesus counters with the real truth. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who have nothing—no power, no prestige, no possessions, no success. They receive the first and greatest blessing—entrance into God’s reign. The rich lay claim to all things, except that. Thus Jesus calls us to live in friendship with the poor, to let go of power and domination, to embrace our own powerlessness. Which is to say, share our lives with the poor, practice downward mobility, and they’ll share with us the reign of God.*

*The (worlds) tenet: “Blessed are those who make others mourn.” Those who...who pay taxes for weapons, who execute people—blessed are they... More, blessed are you if you never mourn. But Jesus sets this anti-beatitude right. He says, blessed are the billions who mourn their loved ones lost to starvation, injustice, relievable disease, and war—from Hiroshima and Vietnam to El Salvador and Iraq. God’s consolation will flow to them. As for us, mourning leads to peacemaking. As we mourn with those who mourn, we receive God’s consolation. Otherwise no comfort will be ours.*

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*And the motto of every warlike culture: “Blessed are the violent and the invincible, the proud and the powerful, the domineering and oppressive. But Jesus says the meek are blessed—the gentle, the humble, the nonviolent. The violent inherit nothing but blood and destruction. The meek, they inherit the earth. Pursuing nonviolence wins the blessing of creation itself. As St. Francis discovered, creation and nonviolence are inextricably linked.*

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for injustice.” The siren song of the System. The System sustains itself by all manner of injustice and lawlessness and greed. But Jesus offers a contrary word. Desire for unjust gain shall forever thwart fulfillment. The unjust will never be satisfied. But those who are passionate for justice, they’ll find satisfaction, true meaning. They’ll take part in God’s very purpose—the transformation of disarmament and global peace.*

*“Blessed are those who show no mercy.” So the culture summons us. No mercy to the poor, to women and children, the elderly and the homeless, victims, outcasts, enemies, refugees, the hungry, the undocumented, the unborn, those on death row, those who are different, those we don’t like. But the culture keeps the spiritual consequence close to its vest: The merciless will be shown no mercy. On the other hand, says Jesus: God’s mercy comes to the merciful.*

*“Blessed are the impure of heart.” The warlike culture tells us that it does not matter if we are filled with darkness and confusion and violence. But such darkness, says Jesus, shades our view of God. It obscures our recognition of Christ in the poor, in the enemy, in one another. Rather*

*“Blessed are the pure in heart”—those with disarmed hearts, nonviolent hearts, hearts of universal love. To attain such wholehearted love, we must practice contemplative prayer, turn our violence over to God and receive in return God’s gift of peace. Thus illumined by the light of God, we’ll see God in the poor, in the struggle for justice, in the bread and the cup, in creation, in the poor, in the enemy. The pure in heart will see God. The beatific vision will begin here and now.*

*“Blessed are the warmakers.” Thus say the (systems of the world). No, says Jesus. “Blessed are the peacemakers”—those who help end war and the conditions for war, who create peace. They are sons and daughters of the living God. Peace is God’s purpose for humanity. God is a God of peace. Since we are God’s children, we make peace, too. The warlike culture tries to name us its patriots, warriors, “good” Americans. It wants to tell us who we are. But Jesus tells us the truth: we are the beloved sons and daughters of the God of peace. That means, like Jesus, we act according to the God of peace, practice nonviolence, resist war, demand that the troops come home from Iraq, and try to live and breathe the holy Spirit of peace.*

*“Blessed are those who never stand up for justice, who do not rock the boat.” The silent, the indifferent, the comfortable, those who keep their distance. Blessed are you—you’ve made it! You’ll ruffle no feathers and invite no trouble—but neither will you possess the reign of God. The reign of God belongs to those “persecuted for the sake of justice.” In a world where war and nuclear weapons run wild, peacemakers get no thanks, no honors. They’re harassed, threatened, put under surveillance, arrested, jailed, even killed. But Jesus says, this is your opportunity to practice nonviolence, to meet hatred with love—just like the prophets and saints.*

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*So Jesus declares: "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in heaven." Do we draw heat for our work against poverty, the death penalty, nuclear weapons, the war on Iraq? Take heart—rejoice and be glad. We're on the right path. We are joining the ranks of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. King, Dorothy Day, Archbishop Romero, and Sister Ita Ford.*

*Recently, however, I learned that some scholars are rethinking the original Greek translation. The passive "Blessed are..." is not accurate, they say. Better the more active phrase: "Walk on! Walk forth!" If true, it rings a different tone, a tone of doggedness, support, encouragement. God cheers us on that we might go the distance in pursuit of justice and peace. Something along these lines:*

*Walk forth, you poor in spirit, you humble and powerless. Keep going. Don't be discouraged by your poverty. The reign of God is yours.*

*Walk forth, you who mourn the victims of war and hunger. Keep going. You will be consoled.*

*Walk forth, you meek and gentle and nonviolent. Inherit the earth and enjoy the blessing of creation.*

*Walk forth, you who hunger and thirst for justice. Don't give up. You will be satisfied. "Justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."*

*Walk forth, you merciful. Keep showing mercy in a merciless world. Forgive everyone. Be compassionate to everyone. Show mercy to everyone. Mercy will be yours.*

*Walk forth, you pure in heart. Keep going. Be filled with the light of peace and see Christ in the poor, in the enemy, in one another.*

*Walk forth, you who make peace. Keep on going. Speak against war. Organize peace vigils. Write Congress, demand the troops come home, work for nuclear disarmament. Become who you are, the sons and daughters of the God of peace.*

*Walk forth, you persecuted for justice. Keep going. Don't give up. You stand on the shoulders of Dr. King, Dorothy Day and Mahatma Gandhi. Your reward will be great.*

*Here are the Beatitudes of Peace, uttered contrary to the anti-beatitudes of war that pulse through the veins of our culture. If we follow these guideposts, hear this encouragement, we learn, the Gospel teaches, that the God of peace is alive and at work among us—giving us God's reign, God's consolation, God's creation, God's satisfaction, God's mercy, God's face, God's calling us her daughters and sons, and God's best reward.*

***In other words, take heart. God is leading us along the path of nonviolence into the fullness of life, a life of peace. There really is good news after all.***

**The Risen Christ who changed all the ways the disciples thought God related to the world....where He is and How works...in real time in real lives revealing the divine in the present!**

As I was writing this message I looked out the window of my office - we had just had a ton of rain and today even though overcast with clouds its like a switch has flipped and the everything is turning green.

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The barren empty landscape is filling with color and beginning to team with life. Seems like it takes me by surprise every year - those trees, bush's, flowers and grass surprise me to say - we are alive. Beloved it seems like we are living in a barren time but may Jesus open our minds to a simple life of faith lived in love will spring life. Amen

**Closing Prayer – Prayer of St. Francis**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy.  
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

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