



“Truly Alive”
Luke 24:36-49
April 28th, 2019

This morning we are having our Kingdom Mission Sunday as we continue the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Following victory over the grave, Jesus made at least ten appearances to His people.

When He appeared to His people, He spoke peace over them. When He appeared, He put encouragement within them. When He appeared several times, He gave them their marching orders—that they were to be those who spread the testimony that Jesus died on the cross for sinners and rose on the third day.

Jesus has given us marching orders. He has given us a mission. Jesus is the Messiah. He is the King. He has work for His people to do. He began commissioning His people at His resurrection, and that is why we call this day Kingdom Mission Sunday. It is a good time for us to be together.

As we dig into the Word of God as a church family today, we are in Luke Chapter 24. Luke takes us to the early evening of Resurrection Sunday. We go behind closed doors with, not only the eleven remaining disciples, but also with a small community of followers and those who were also disciples of Jesus.

They were hearing reports that the tomb was empty, and the body of Jesus was gone. Some of the sisters had come back that morning, some of the women who were among some of the most devoted followers. These women spoke of an angelic presence at the tomb of Jesus. The angel declared to them, *Why are you looking for the living among the dead. He is not here. He is risen!*

The women came back and gave this report and more people were also saying that they had seen Jesus. But the disciples were struggling with it all. They could not figure out how this could be so. They were having great difficulty wrapping their hearts and minds around the fact that Jesus was risen from death.

On that early evening of the resurrection we see this record of how Jesus Himself appeared to them. We see the measures that Jesus took to get it in their thick skulls that He was in fact there, their living resurrected Savior.

Once His followers were convinced of His resurrection, Jesus spoke life into them. They were gathered together as His band of followers, and Jesus gave them their commission. They were a community of believers and Jesus had purposes for them. What we have here is the Living Lord

giving instruction to the community. As the community took in what He said, they were truly a living and vibrant group.

I want us to take in both aspects of this. We are going to have words for a living church from the Living Lord. Let's see how this laid out before in Luke Chapter 24 and Verses 36 through 49:

³⁶As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" ³⁷But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit 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. ⁴¹And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate before them. 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 and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And 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."

We have this account of how Jesus appeared, the risen Lord standing in the midst of His disciples and He was so in His tangible resurrection body. They struggled and thought they had seen a ghost. They were started and afraid. It freaked them out. They really were not expecting this to happen.

We also see in this text that Jesus took two measures to get it across to them that it is real and that He was alive in a resurrection body and that He had rose from the dead. The first thing that He did was to say, *Look and touch my hands and my feet. Look and see. Does a spirit have flesh and bones like I have?*

Then Jesus allowed the disciples to touch Him. He could be touched. What is so interesting to me, brothers and sisters, is that when He said this, He did not say to touch His shoulder or arm or back. Rather, He told them to see His hands and His feet.

Why do you think that Jesus might identify those portions of His risen body? It is because the prints of His execution and crucifixion were still there and they had a very, very powerful picture of Jesus' crucifixion still in their minds.

What we see is that even in His resurrected form, Jesus had those prints. I would understand that they still remain. All the scars and wounds and lacerations from His flogging, they had been healed. His skin was then clean and smooth, but those prints remained on His hands and feet.

Someday, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we are going to see the Lord. We are going to be reminded of the marks of the greatness of His grace and His love for us, because those scars still remain. This is the first measure that Jesus took.

Then I think that the temperature in that room started to change as this was beginning to enter into their hearts. There was a sense in which the disciples were startled and frightened, then that began giving way to a rising joy in their midst.

This passage even uses this curious language of how *they disbelieved for joy*. What does that mean? I think it is like when we see something that is too good to be true. Perhaps in the language of our day and age, the disciples might have stepped back and said, *No way. No way. No way!* And Jesus said, *Yes, way!*

I can't imagine that it was with anything else but joy that Jesus then took His next measure to help them understand that He was there, risen and in an actual body. He asked them if they had anything to eat. They had one of the staples of their diets. They had fish, so they gave Jesus some fish. Then Jesus consumed it.

Resurrection bodies are capable of such consumption. Yes, I think there is going to be a real Wedding Supper of the Lamb, where we in our resurrection bodies will eat and feast to the glory of the Lord.

I am blatantly speculating here, but understanding the staples of the Mediterranean diet, not only did they eat fish, but they also ate a lot of bread. They did not have puffy loafs of bread like we have. Rather, they had flatbread, unleavened bread. Their bread would have resembled a tortilla more than a loaf of Wonder Bread.

I like to take my meat and combine it with a little bit of bread. So, if the disciples had pieces of flatbread and pieces of fish and combined them together and folded up the bread, what does that resemble? A fish taco! So, we have a fourteen-year fine tradition at Bethel Grace where we eat fish tacos to the glory of the Risen Savior. That is what we will be doing today!

Looking at everything that took place in that upper room, we see a display of Jesus showing Himself alive, tangibly risen from the dead. He is the Lord of life. Not only did He give them evidence that He was alive, but He also spoke to them about what He was calling them to do as a gathering of people, as a fellowship of people, as a community of the Kingdom that He reigns over. He was giving them their marching orders.

As I have been contemplating this, one of my very, very favorite passages of Scripture, it is when a family of believers takes these things to heart and, by God's grace, lives them out that we are the living body of Christ. The metaphor in Scripture is that we are the body of Christ in the world today.

It is true that Jesus is enthroned in heaven, bodily resurrected, but we want to be His living body on earth, the church. It is as we live out the instructions that we receive from Jesus here, that we have that kind of vitality that ought to describe us.

So I want us to look at four qualities of a church that is really alive, because there are so many churches that, even while they continue to exist, it is like they are dead while they live. The life is not there. Together, I think we want for Bethel Grace to be a place that is always spiritually vibrant in the Lord, living in Jesus as a Kingdom Community.

Let's hear what Jesus had to say and glean these principles:

FOUR QUALITIES OF A LIVING CHURCH. The first one I see is this:

1. It's experiencing God's peace

It is the first thing that Jesus said to them. Look at what it says in Verse 36. The disciples were gathered. Jesus arrived on the scene and appeared in the room:

³⁶As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"

What is the first word out of the mouth of the Living Lord to the disciples gathered there? Peace! Peace, brothers and sisters. Shalom.

When you read the resurrection appearances of Christ to His people, He kept saying *peace*. I think it is more than just a salutation. He was speaking forth His will for them that they be a community of peace.

Jesus had just accomplished peace with God by His death on the cross by suffering the agony that sinners deserved by taking upon Himself the cup of God's wrath. He has accomplished peace with God by paying the price for our sin and He wanted to convey to them and to us the peace of God. Peace with God is that internal state of well-being that comes when we know that we are forgiven by grace as we humble ourselves before the Lord for forgiveness.

There is that sense of inner peace, but then there is also the sense of peace among those that we are gathered with. The Lord desires that every church be a place where the peace of God is experienced among the people.

The Hebrew concept of shalom is more than just the absence of hostility. There is that, but it is also the presence of well-being. Christ desired this for the disciples. Christ desires this for us and, brothers and sisters, shalom is the bond that keeps the people of God together.

Shalom is like divine adhesive. When there is peace, we are drawn in because we are being replenished. One of Satan's great tactics is to sow seeds of discord and conflict among the people of God.

So we need to be those who are pursuing the peace of Jesus Christ. Listen how the once spiteful Pharisee turned loving Apostle Paul put it to the Ephesians. Listen carefully as I read Ephesians Chapter 4 and Verses 1 through 3:

¹I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worth of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Those are wonderful words to a church that would have been racially and religiously mixed. All the Jews and all the Gentiles of Asia Minor were together in a single community, and Paul was saying, *Let there be the bond, the adhesive, the glue of peace.*

This peace is something that is created by the Holy Spirit:

³...maintain the unity of the Spirit..

The Spirit produces that harmony, that unity. We maintain that harmony. How do we maintain it? Through shalom.

It says here that we are to be those who walk in all humility and gentleness. You might be right about some things, and you might be wrong about a great many other things. We need to have some humility. We might not see the big picture in every disagreement that we have with others in the church.

Humility also involves a willingness and a desire to serve, to bless people in Jesus Name with gentleness. Never are we harsh or rude toward one another. Paul said *with all gentleness* as we interact with one another, then bearing with one another in love.

What does it tell you that over and over again in the Christian community there is going to have to be forbearance and love? Forbearance. Patience. That means that from time to time, the people around you might ruffle your feathers. But Paul was telling us to have patience.

We need to know that we have been given grace and we need to be those who practice that grace. In doing so, there is that bond of peace that is being spoken of here. Jesus wants us to be people of peace. There must be this quality of peace.

We continue and see a second quality of a living church. Not only is it experiencing God's peace, but:

2. It's tuned in to God's Word

In Verses 37 through 43, Jesus went on to give them the necessary measures to assure them that they were not hallucinating. Then in Verse 44, we have Jesus expressing the need for them to be tuned in and attentive to the Scripture.

Look what it says in Verses 44 and 45:

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 and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures

Not only was Jesus able to read their minds, He was able to open their minds as well. At this moment, He helped them to understand how all throughout the Old Testament—all three major categories in the Hebrew reckoning of Scripture which is through the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets—the Scriptures pointed to the Messiah, even His very death and resurrection.

Jesus gave the disciples this moment by His grace of understanding. He opened their minds to understand the Scripture. We need to say, *Lord, tune me in. Open my mind that I might see the wonderful things in Your Law, in Your Word. Help me to be a person who is perceptive of the living nature of Scripture.*

When that happens, your heart starts glowing. The Living Word of God gives you newness. When you have a community of people who are tuned in to God’s Word, it is an awesome thing. I think about Simon Peter. Recently reading through 1 and 2 Peter, I think that Peter’s epistles are so rich and flowing with the Old Testament.

Peter quoted the Old Testament Scripture, and it is even as though all the language of the Old Testament is being meshed into his. He was just an old fisherman, but look at him! His writing, it is so deep. His was so attune with the Scripture. This is because, by the grace of Jesus, Peter was tuned in and the Word of God became a new Book for him.

We need to be those who ask the Lord to give us His Spirit and to help us understand His Word, that we might be a peculiar kingdom community that is filled with the life of God. This is not going to happen apart from the Book, ladies and gentlemen. His Word is foundational, and we neglect Scripture to our demise and our peril. We must be tuned in to the Word of God.

Have you had that moment in your life where the Word of God, the Bible, it became a new Book for you, when you are reading it and you finally get it? It’s tuning in, maybe through teaching or preaching or through your own reading. That needs to happen, and we need to pray that the Lord would give it to us.

I remember very clearly when that was happening for me. The Lord did a work by grace of tuning in that old, fresh water fisherman. And one day, He tuned in a young saltwater surfer. I was in my early 20s and began reading Scripture, tuning in to some teaching of Scripture. I remember reading through the history books of the Old Testament and understanding where Isaiah fits. I was reading the prophecies of Isaiah and it filled my heart.

I read Acts in the New Testament and realized that is where Ephesus was. I began reading Philippians and it started glowing. Not only is it an academic understanding of things where you see how it all fits, but it’s starts to glow. The heart and mind are opened up to the Scripture. I remember wanting to be taught the Bible. I wanted to talk about the Bible. Eventually down the line, I even wanted to take a crack at teaching the Bible.

When a community is filled with a love for the Bible, it is going to be a community that glorifies God. It is going to be living community. We need to be those who are devoted to Scripture. How have you been doing in that? Have you been taking the time that is necessary to soak in the Word of God?

Sometimes we just got to do it as a discipline. But we need to be in the Word when we are not rushed. Perhaps reducing the number of verses that we read will help. When we quiet ourselves, get tuned in. Where the people of the church are doing this, it is an awesome thing. However, when the community of God neglects that, it is going to be dull. We need to be people tuned in.

Right here we have the Living Savior tuning His disciples in. I pray that we as a church will always be tuned in. It is part of our calling as a Kingdom Community. We move forward and see another quality of a living church.

It is not enough for the Living Word of God to be resonating within the church walls. It expands and goes out. It is not only to take place among the community of believers. The Word of God is to spread from there, like a fountain that starts among the people God in their quiet times. It then spreads out, so the third quality of a living church is that:

3. It's active in God's mission

To not only be built in the truth of God themselves, we are to spread and share it with other people. We see this as we go into Verses 45 through 48. Let's look at what it says:

⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things.

Jesus went from the Scriptural to the personal. *The Scripture and I proclaim to you my death and resurrection. It is when people humble themselves under this message, turning from sin to me, that they are forgiven.* It goes from the Scriptural to the personal.

Verse 48 says, *You are witnesses of these things.* They were witnesses in a very powerful and historical way in that they saw the Risen Lord. But we are witnesses of His working of grace in our lives too. There is a message to be shared. We need to be praying for those that the Lord has given us to reach for Jesus.

This week I have been reading a really, really good book by a young woman named Jackie Hill Perry. The book is called *Gay Girl, Good God*. It is such a powerful testimony of the work of the Spirit in her life.

I have only made it a little more than half way through, and have found that this book is so powerful. It has led me to worship repeatedly and repeatedly. Not only that, it has led me to think about the people around me in my world, praying for them.

Perry gives an autobiography that is weaved with biblical principles throughout. As I read her testimony of coming to a living and joyful and obedient faith in Christ in all aspects of her life, the big take-away for me is the power of prayer by which God somehow uses that is His plan to reach into people's hearts to draw them to Himself.

Perry had no interest in pursuing the Lord. He was not part of her life. She had a lifestyle that she was immersed in and that's the lifestyle that she intended to stay in. Then out of nowhere, she started having these impressions of the presence of God. She began experiencing the fear of the Lord.

She began understanding that the wages of sin is death. And not just one form of sexual sin, but just a life of sin. Perry started to understand these things, and it all began weighing down on her, but she was not interested in it or pursuing it. She was not seeking it out.

In the book, she talks about how she was in her bedroom getting some rest in her bed when the fear of the Lord started coming to her. So she eventually reached out to her cousin whom she knew to be a Christian, telling her what she was experiencing and telling her she had some questions.

Her cousin said to her, *Jackie, I need you to know that the Lord loves you very much and I have been praying for you relentlessly. I have been praying that you would tune in to the things of the Lord.* The young lady who wrote this book, she attributes the work of grace in her life first of all to the plan of God before the foundations of the world through the instrumentality of someone who loved her and was praying for her and wanted to see her heart reached with the Gospel.

It is a powerful read, although I am only half way through. I began thinking about the people around me and asking myself again if I have become a little bit complacent in my prayers for people and in my request for the Lord to use me in their lives.

If we are going to be a church that is vital, we have to be a church that is walking in the work that the Lord has for us. That work is to reach people for Jesus Christ. If that is not happening, the church declines. We need to be those who are alive in His mission.

The Lord has given you a sphere of influenced lives. We call it the SOIL. Jesus has planted you where you are. He has planted me in a certain place. He has done this intentionally and providentially, that the Kingdom might come near to people throughout our area. Who are they?

It begins with prayer and it continues with reaching them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the Lord is softening hearts and making opportunities. We need to be thinking and praying about these things because this is the Lord's will for us.

Finally, not only are we active in God's mission, but:

4. It's clothed with God's power

We need to be clothed with God's power. We can't do it in our own strength. Look at how Jesus said this in Verse 49:

⁴⁹And 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 is speaking to you about the promise of the Father and power of heaven and the promise and the power are one in the same. He is a person. This is the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. He comes to indwell each Christian. When He comes, He comes with power from heaven to do the work of God. This is the work and the power of the Holy Spirit that we need to be clothed in.

Every now and then, you will hear somebody from the business world talk about how they have multiple power suits in their wardrobe. It is a perfectly tailored dark colored suit that would make this person feel confident and successful and in control.

There might be such things as power suits in the business world, but that there is no style of dress or article of clothing or fabric that is going to make you more or less powerful in the Kingdom of Jesus.

Rather, it is about being clothed in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, *Wait, don't go until you are clothed in the power of Heaven.* And we need to ask the Lord to fill our hearts up and renew His power in us, filling us up again.

Think of it: What kind of power does the Holy Spirit bring to His people? If you look to the beginning of Chapter 24, you will see the kind of power that He brings. This same Spirit that we get clothed in and empowered by, He had something to do with an empty grave and a resurrection.

Sometimes we just have to ask the Lord to fill us with His power that He might reach others in order to raise them to spiritual life. There in the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit did a physical work of resurrection. Jesus was tangibly raised from the dead. At the end of time, He is going to do another work of resurrection. Jeff Saltzmann is going to inhabit eternity in a glorious, wonderful, powerful, imperishable, resurrection body that is going to be six-foot-one-inch tall!

There was one resurrection at the tomb of Jesus. That's the first fruit of the resurrection to come. In the meantime, the Holy Spirit is doing spiritual resurrection. People are dead in their transgression and sin, and by grace through faith by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they are raised to new life.

We need to pray that the Lord would work His power through us that we might have the joy of being part of those things. I pray that there is a renewal in desire among all of us in this particular aspect of God's Work. Let's pray that the Lord would make it so.

As I finish, I was walking through the streets of east Long Beach the other night with my girl, Lydie-Lou. Quite honestly, every now and then, I deal with heaviness of heart. Dealing with this heaviness of heart I tell the Lord that I need renewal and revival and to keep coming back to Him.

I was walking through the streets listening to worship, listening to some of the music that I listened to very early in my walk with Christ where everything was just so fresh and new. I was remembering what the Lord said to the church of Ephesus in the book of Revelation. I asked the Lord to revive my first love, making me alive and powerful.

I was listening to one of the worship artists that I listened to often as a man in my early 20s, Keith Green. I was listening to one of the first songs I learned on my guitar, singing praises the Lord. That song is called *O Lord You're Beautiful*. I found a live version of this song and was listening to it as I was walking through the streets.

This particular version of the song had some testimony that Green gave before he sang it. It really hit me. This was his testimony:

“On Monday night this week, about midnight, I wrote a letter to the Lord. I didn’t know where to mail it, so I put it in my Bible. And I asked him, “Lord you’ve got to do something about my heart. You know a lot of time has gone by since I met you, and it’s starting to harden up. You know it’s kind of natural, but I want to have baby skin, Lord. I want skin like a baby on my heart. It’s starting to get old and wrinkled and calloused. It’s not because of anything I’m doing. It’s because of a lot of things I’m not doing. I stayed up until about 2 in the morning writing this song.”

That just hit me. He said that he was experiencing hardness of heart, not because of anything he was doing, but because of what he was not doing. *Oh, Lord, in the mist of the things that I am doing, there is a whole lot that I’m not.* This was such a word that entered into me.

We need to understand that sometimes hardness comes not only as a result of sins of commission, where we are transgressing the direct will of God, but sins of omission. We are not doing the things that require faith, stepping out in faith.

I wonder if there is anything in your life, anything that you are doing or not doing, that is hindering you. Take it before the Lord. Take it before the Lord and ask Him where you need to be activated and renewed. When that happens collectively as a church body, that is when vibrancy becomes so wonderful and powerful.

I am thankful for two of our sisters, Suzanne and Linda, who are going play a song now. The song is called *Be Thou My Vision*. I want this to be a time of reflection for all of us personally before the Lord as we have heard different aspects of what leads to vitality in the Christian life and in the Christian church

Take it quietly before the Lord and ask: What do I need to be activated in? Am I engaged with the brothers and the sisters here at the church? Am I involved in the fullness of shalom? Lord, give me vision of where I enter into that.

Also, as we continue, I want you to be thinking about how you are doing with Scripture. Is your Bible collecting dust? That's not good. How are you going to be communing with the Lord in the Word of God? How about in your outreach? How about your interest and involvement with the people in your life for Jesus?

Take these things before the Lord and ask Him to give you direction as to where you need to be. Let me close this time in the Word with prayer. Then we will have some time with the Lord, asking Him to give us the vision that we need.

Let's pray