

CELEBRATING A GOD WHO REDEEMS

Nehemiah 8:1-12; Luke 24:30-49

(Read Luke 24:30-49)

Intro: Jesus showed up as these two disciples, Cleopas, and an unnamed person, maybe his wife, were walking to the town of Emmaus. He knew what they were talking about – he’s Jesus, but even if he didn’t he would have realized that they were talking about their dear friend and rabbi, Jesus. They had such hopes. He was so good and wise. He seemed like he was the answer.

A. W. Tozer said “*What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.*” If someone walked in on a conversation you were having about Jesus, what would they discern by what you saying?

And that brings me to a question, what comes to your mind when you think about God?

“I know you’re out there somewhere...”

or

“What an angry God!”

(Give opportunity for answers)

People who are mad at God are very miserable.

People who don’t believe in God are hopeless.

People who believe in a God who redeems are almost always the happiest.

It just follows – what you think about God is the most important thing about you. I pray today that you are celebrants like these disciples Jesus joined on their walk to Emmaus. Once they realize who he was they were bursting with celebration.

Here’s my prayer for these uncertain days: I pray that what you think about God brings joy to your entire existence. If not now, then by the end of this service.

Let’s look at what it means to celebrate our redeeming God. First . . .

We celebrate the reality of the resurrection

- William Barclay says that the text I just read from Luke “[S]tresses the reality of the resurrection. The risen Lord was no phantom or hallucination. He was real. The Jesus who died was in truth the Christ who rose again. Christianity is not founded on the dreams of men's disordered minds or the visions of their fevered eyes, but on one who in actual historical fact faced and fought and conquered death and rose again.” Jesus had accomplished the impossible – and he was literal, visible, and palpable proof – right in front of them.
- We celebrate that! That’s why Easter Sunday is the most important holiday of all – Christ’s resurrection makes possible our resurrection. That deserves a party. Because Jesus Christ had victory over death, we have victory over death too. That’s why when a Christ follower dies, as we have experienced with astonishing regularity of late, more often than not, his/her funeral is a celebration. Yes, we miss that loved one – **badly**, but we know we will see them again, that’s the reality of the resurrection. But it’s only true for the redeemed. You need to have Christ as Lord of your life to be part of the celebration and then you can party because . . .

We celebrate because we have been redeemed

- This is because we have been given a way to know our need by what is revealed to us in scripture. It shows us our need and then shows us the way. In the Nehemiah passage Bonnie read we saw that Ezra read the scripture to the people and then he and other teachers explained it to them. When the people realized what the scriptures were actually saying they were moved to the core and they wept. They realized their sin and they realized what they had been missing for all those exile years when they had been far from the Word of God. They wept because they believed what the words were saying to their hearts.
- Blaise Pascal a 17th century mathematician, philosopher, and Christ follower said, “*Human knowledge must be understood to be believed, but divine knowledge must be believed to be understood.*” The Bible must be believed and applied to our lives. J. Vernon McGee said “*I think the Bible is a closed book to the critic and the infidel. He can learn a few facts, but he misses the message. On the other hand, some simple soul whose heart is turned in humble faith to God will be enlightened by the Holy Spirit of God. The eyes of his understanding will be opened.*” The truth is, if we don’t believe the Bible we have no reason for being here

– and too often it feels like people who call themselves Christians don't really believe the Bible. I mean, if they did we would know they need to be a whole lot more serious about their relationship to Christ they would know how much there is to celebrate.

- And that's why . . .

We celebrate that our God is a God of second chances

- The people to whom Ezra was reading the word to were told to stop crying and start partying! The reason they were hearing the word was because God in his mercy had given them another chance. The disciples discovered that too – especially Peter. They had been hearing that Jesus was making resurrection appearances – even to Peter! Peter, the one who had so shamefully denied his friend was one of the first to whom Jesus had revealed himself – Our God is a God of second chances. Remember No Fear? It's a men's clothing line that used to be more prevalent than now. I always wondered if the wearers really knew no fear. And I ask, do we really know no fear?
- The disciples were cowering in an upper room in what they hoped was a safe house and incredulously they were listening to the good news of the resurrection appearance the two disciples who had been with Jesus on the Emmaus Road told them and ta da! There was Jesus. And he said "*Peace to you!*" Luke 24:36. F. B. Meyer writes this of Jesus' greeting "***Peace Be unto You.***" *Jesus himself is here! We need nothing else when we are terrified and afraid. You may be fearing the consequences of your sin; fearing the approach of your enemy; fearing the future with its unknown contingencies; but Jesus himself is the antidote of fear. He keeps the soul that trusts him within the double doors of peace.* But they didn't have peace. They were afraid! But why!? Here was Jesus! Why do you doubt? Well, it's because it seemed too good to be true. And besides their brains were on overload – they had had more emotional stuff come at them in the last week and a half than most people have in years. But it wasn't too good to be true. It was both very good and very true.
- Then they celebrated and didn't fear anymore. Like the two disciples who had run the seven miles from Emmaus back to Jerusalem because they had good news – these disciples had to go out and tell the nations, – look at vv. 46-48, *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.* Luke 24:46-48. They had good news and so do we, so

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We celebrate because WE have Good News to tell

- Jesus's hosts had a case of heartburn – *Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?* Luke 24:32 (Tell about when Sheila was born) I had good news! I wanted to celebrate. We celebrate when we rejoice, we rejoice because we are joyful. We are joyful because we have good news. Jesus is the GOOD NEWS! The new life he gives is GOOD NEWS!
- When we see a celebration, we want to know why there's a party going on. Do people wonder what the party is when we are here on Sunday morning or do they wonder who died? Does what you think about God show on your face when you worship? Remember what you think about God is the most important thing about you. So . . .
- We better have heartburn too or we need heart surgery. Our Sunday morning gathering should be a celebration of the redeemed. Yes, someone died but he rose again and because of that we have life eternal, death holds no fear. That's worth celebrating; that's GOOD NEWS! Let's tell it.
- And another thing . . .

We celebrate because we have Holy Spirit power

- Jesus told the disciples *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.* Luke 24:49. What was he promising? The Holy Spirit.
- But we need to wait on it. Bruce Barton says, *Trying to drive a car without the keys, operating a power tool without electricity, a hydroelectric plant without any water source—all of these futile actions make as much sense as trying to minister to others without the power of the Holy Spirit. Believers can do nothing good without his power, yet how often they try! Christians schedule revival as if God ran on their schedule, they launch evangelistic efforts without praying that God will prepare people's hearts, and they run*

churches and ministries as if God were more interested in marketing and management techniques than people's souls. How tragic—and how foolish! Take a page from the first church's strategy for growth: wait for the power from on high.

- We can get ahead of the Lord really fast. I think that part of celebration is slowing down and waiting on God's power. Barclay says this about verse 49, *"It stresses the secret of power. They had to wait in Jerusalem until power from on high came upon them. There are occasions when the Christian may seem to be wasting time, as he waits in a wise passivity. Action without preparation must often fail. There is a time to wait on God and a time to work for God."* Wait and while you do, celebrate.
- And finally . . .

We celebrate because Christ makes himself known in Communion

- Ah yes, Communion!! After all it's World Communion Sunday and we are joining Christ Followers all around the world in celebrating the body and blood of Christ.
- In Communion we celebrate the Cross. Jesus was pointing out to his disciples here that he was indeed the one whom they had watched die a horrible death just days before. Now here he was, very much alive. The cross was necessary for the resurrection to happen. Quoting from Barclay again *"It was to the cross that all the scriptures looked forward. The cross was not forced on God; it was not an emergency measure when all else had failed and when the scheme of things had gone wrong. It was part of the plan of God, for it is the one place on earth, where in a moment of time, we see his eternal love."*
- We celebrate God's love in Communion. We remember his body broken for us; we remember his blood shed for us. We celebrate his sacrifice in our stead. At communion we are mysteriously joined to the one who saved us. Communion is sacred and celebratory at the same time. It's sacred as we remember the cross and it's celebratory as we remember the resurrection. It's sacred as we remember that Christ went to the cross for our sin, it's celebratory as we remember that he included us in his plan. We celebrate communion as we celebrate a God who redeems.

Conclusion: Jesus disciples knew Jesus when he broke the bread. It's that way for us too. We acknowledge that we know him when we break the bread. As we take communion today let's celebrate our redeeming Lord. The one who redeems us is present with us. Let's celebrate that as we enter into Communion. Amen.

Preparation for communion in prayer.

Transition to Communion