

## **SUNDAY Gospel of the Unseen**

Scripture: Luke 24:36-40, 46-49

While they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" They were terrified and afraid. They thought they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you startled? Why are doubts arising in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet. It's really me! Touch me and see, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones like you see I have." As he said this, he showed them his hands and feet.

He said to them, "This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Look, I'm sending to you what my Father promised, but you are to stay in the city until you have been furnished with heavenly power."

## **MONDAY Luke 24:18-27, 44-48**

### **"He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures"**

In his gospel's last chapter, Luke twice wrote that the risen Jesus taught his disciples what the (Hebrew) Scriptures said about him. One of his parables said if people wouldn't heed "Moses and the Prophets," they wouldn't be persuaded even if someone rose from the dead (cf. Luke 16:27-31). Jesus wanted his followers' faith to have a firm Scriptural basis. This week we'll study some of the Old Testament passages he likely referred to in his teaching.

- Lies from governments, large corporations and important people have made most of us deeply skeptical, often prone to trust only our own senses and experiences. Do you believe Jesus had good reasons for teaching his followers about the Scriptures, rather than just running around appearing in person to as many people as he possibly could? Are you willing to trust God even in areas that go beyond your personal experience?
- Think back to Jesus' temptations (cf. Luke 4:1-12). Each temptation invited Jesus to do a dazzling outward deed that might bypass the need for faith, and establish him as the Messiah beyond all doubt. He firmly refused, in each case citing the Scriptures. In what ways have you found that faith, like love, needs to be freely given, rather than compelled by overwhelming "proof"?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you that, as Hebrews said, you are the same yesterday, today and forever. Help me see and value the constancy of your saving heart as found through the ages in the Scriptures. Amen.

## **TUESDAY Psalm 16:7-11 “You won’t abandon my life to the grave”**

In Psalm 16, the psalmist asked for God’s protection and guidance. In exuberant, even hyperbolic poetic words, the psalmist said God’s protection would see him through even life-threatening challenges. In Acts 2:25-28, Peter pointed to David’s tomb in Jerusalem, and said only the risen Jesus had fully received the divine promise of deliverance from the grave. (In Acts 13:35, Paul also used this Psalm to reinforce his preaching of Jesus.)

- We celebrated Easter on April 20. We remembered again that Jesus said, “Because I live, you will live too” (John 14:19). Pastor Hamilton reminded us that, in Frederick Buechner’s phrase, “the worst thing is never the last thing.” Have you personally claimed the Easter faith, incorporating the promise that “you won’t abandon my life to the grave” into every day of your walk with God?
- Psalm 16 began, “Protect me, God.” For the psalmist, as for most of us, those words first speak of safety from physical harm. Yet we also marked Easter in the shadow of the tragic shooting death of 3 people at the Jewish Community Center, a few blocks from our church. Could martyrs like the apostle Paul, or Jesus himself, pray “Protect me, God”? What are some key ways besides physical well-being that God protects you?

**Prayer:** Loving Lord, protect me today—from wandering from your path for my life, from the ways evil and apathy tug at my heart, from the ego that thinks I know better than you do. And yes, if you will, from physical harm, too. Amen.

## **WEDNESDAY Psalm 118:6-22 “I won’t die—no, I will live”**

Psalm 118 praised God for his steadfast love. This was the last *hallel* (hymn of praise) Hebrews sang at Passover (cf. Mark 14:26) as they recalled God freeing Israel from slavery in Egypt. Jesus, just before his arrest and crucifixion, sang these words from the Psalm: “The Lord is for me—I won’t be afraid. What can anyone do to me?”; “The stone rejected by the builders is now the main foundation stone”; and “I won’t die—no, I will live.”

- Re-read verses 6-9. The Psalmist asked the simple yet profound question, “The Lord is for me ... What can anyone do to me?” Do you trust that God is indeed “for” you? In what ways can you “take refuge” in the Lord today above any human source of safety? Verse 22 spoke of the “main foundation stone” (some translations use “cornerstone”), the key stone in the entire structure. Is Jesus the “main foundation stone” in your life’s structure?
- Picture it: Jesus was with his disciples for the Last Supper, a Passover meal. He knew exactly why he had come to Jerusalem and what would happen to him the next day. Despite what was about to come, Jesus sang Psalm 118 with his disciples, including verse 17: “I won’t die—no, I will live.” What does that show you about Jesus’ faith as he faced suffering? We’re tempted to think suffering means God doesn’t care about us. What can you say about what God has done for you in and through suffering?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for your example of faith, and for conquering death on Easter. Help me make you the “main foundation stone” in my life and share Easter hope with those around me. Amen.

## **THURSDAY Psalm 110:1-4 “The Lord says, ‘Sit right beside me’”**

Scholars call Psalm 110 a “coronation psalm,” a hymn of blessing originally written to honor a king’s coronation day. Archaeologists have found similar coronation poems written among Israel’s neighbor nations. Jesus himself claimed the language of Psalm 110 to describe his reign in Luke 20:41-44, and the early Christians took their cue from him (cf. Acts 7:55–56; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22).

- Any nation, any king (including those of Israel’s pagan neighbors) would like to think that the deity holds the ruler close in approval. But as with most of the other Old Testament passages we’re studying, only Jesus, the “king of kings” (cf. Revelation 19:16) could fully claim to sit “right beside” God. In what ways does the picture of Jesus “having God’s ear” strengthen your faith and bring you comfort in hard times?
- Psalm 110:4 added a note of mystery and power, speaking of Melchizedek, the king of Salem (peace) who greeted Abraham with bread and wine in Genesis 14:18-20. Hebrews 7 expanded on this picture, comparing Jesus in various ways to the figure of Melchizedek. How open are you to accepting the mystery of the divine/human person of Jesus? In what ways does that which is mysterious deepen your appreciation of his power and lordship?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you are the King of kings, you are the Lord of lords. I cannot fully understand you, but I can and do ask you to be Lord of my life. Amen.

## **FRIDAY Psalm 22:1-22 “My God! My God!”**

Psalm 22 used violent images to express how totally helpless the psalmist felt. Surrounded by bulls, lions, wild dogs—no one on earth is strong enough to deal with such irresistible enemies. Jesus, his mind filled with the Scriptures, did not need to literally recite all 31 verses of Psalm 22 to show that the whole psalm, not just its first verse, framed his heart’s cry to God on the cross.

- The United Bible Societies’ *Translator’s Handbook on the Book of Psalms* says, “This psalm is characterized by ... a series of alternating shifts downward and upward (negative and positive feelings).” The psalm spoke of personal wrestling with God. It began “My God, my God,” and verse 19 says “You are my strength.” What helps you build a faith-filled bond that can reach out to “your God” even at your darkest times?
- John 19:24 said the Roman soldiers at the cross fulfilled Psalm 22:18. (It’s even possible that seeing the soldiers act out verses 7-8 and 17-18 helped call Psalm 22 to Jesus’ mind.) When have you struggled with your own “valley of the shadow,” but in the end found your trust in God stronger because of the experience?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, at times my world grows dark, and I cry out to you in distress and dismay. You are always there, even in the darkness. Help me cling to you as doggedly and determinedly as Jesus did. Amen.

**SATURDAY Isaiah 52:13-53:12 “He was pierced because of our rebellions”** Rabbis debated who Isaiah’s fourth “servant song” was about. The first Christians had no doubt—they quoted this song more than any other verses to describe Jesus’ redemptive suffering. *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* said, “Isaiah articulates a new and powerful vision of redemption in which violence is absorbed and transformed. In Isaiah 52–53 the heralding of Israel’s divine warrior returning to bring Zion’s deliverance (52:7–12), suddenly gives way to a description of a suffering servant of Yahweh (52:13–53:12).” Isaiah’s vision was that God does not increase the level of violence to win. And in Jesus, the early Christians saw, God took violence onto himself and changed it into a redemptive force.

- Once again Jesus set the stage for the way New Testament writers applied Isaiah 53 by saying that the passage was about him (cf. Luke 22:37). It all came true in Jesus’ saving death and resurrection, they said. What does Jesus’ way of defeating evil as the Suffering Servant tell you about the kind of God we serve? What kinds of evil have you faced? How does Jesus’ example guide you toward the path of true victory at those times?

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, thank you for being the ultimate suffering servant. Please teach me how to transform my suffering into a creative, life-giving force as well. Amen.

**Family Activity:** As a family, share ideas about how you can work with God to bring comfort and care to others. Discuss each person’s unique gifts and abilities. How can you use those to comfort others? How can family members combine their gifts with one another to care and help? Use construction paper to create the symbol of a heart. On it, write or draw the gifts of each person. Also write or draw about how those gifts can help to comfort people who are sad or lonely. Pray together, asking God to help guide you to use your ideas and gifts. Thank God for giving them to you. Display your family’s “heart” as a reminder to comfort others this year.

This study was adapted from The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection.