

Isaiah 43:1, 8-13 (New Revised Standard Version)

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. {8} Bring forth the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears! {9} Let all the nations gather together, and let the peoples assemble. Who among them declared this, and foretold to us the former things? Let them bring their witnesses to justify them, and let them hear and say, "It is true." {10} You are my witnesses, says the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. {11} I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior. {12} I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses, says the LORD. {13} I am God, and also henceforth I am He; there is no one who can deliver from my hand; I work and who can hinder it?

Luke 24:36-48 (New Revised Standard Version)

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." {37} They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. {38} He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? {39} Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." {40} And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. {41} While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" {42} They gave him a piece of broiled fish, {43} and he took it and ate in their presence. {44} Then 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, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." {45} Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, {46} and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, {47} and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. {48} You are witnesses of these things.

Serving as a chaplain at the Veterans hospital in Richmond, VA  
was a very significant experience in my preparation for ministry.

One time, there was a huge disturbance with lots of angry shouting  
when a disabled veteran was being denied his medical benefits  
because the VA's computer had him listed as "deceased".

He was more than a little infuriated and frustrated, even screaming  
as he tried to convince a skeptical and impatient administrator  
that he was who he claimed to be and that he was very much alive.  
The admitting clerk's attitude was that it would be so much easier  
and far less paperwork if he would just go along with being dead,  
which made things even worse and nearly explosive.

But that VA hospital situation does raise a fascinating question,  
how would you go about proving to a computer that you're still alive?  
The situation in the Luke passage was something like that.

The setting is the evening of Easter, a very busy day for Jesus.

He had been resurrected and left the tomb before sunrise  
and had appeared alive to the shocked and stunned women,  
whom the disciples doubted and disbelieved.

Then he walked to Emmaus with a pair of discouraged followers,  
who then rushed back to tell the disciples in Jerusalem about it,  
all of which proceeded the events & conversation of this passage.

While they were still discussing these events and their confusion,

Jesus suddenly appears where the disciples are gathered, vs. 36,

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

**Peace be with you** or shalom, means, from a theological perspective,  
to be in the zone, or in accord with God's purpose and intention.  
It's being exactly on track with God's will, God's call & intent.

Of course they're surprised, stunned & afraid when they saw him, vs. 37

They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

They knew that he died on the cross and was placed in a tomb on Friday,  
and generally speaking, they expected someone dead to stay dead.

And like that veteran at the hospital, Jesus wanted to convince them  
that he was who he is, that he really is alive and he's not a ghost,  
so Jesus urged them to consider the evidence before them, vs. 39-40

Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

"See for yourselves and touch my wounds" ... **for by this,**  
**the scars of his suffering authenticated his identity.**

So too our scars, physical, emotional and spiritual are important,  
because they represent and tell significant stories about us,  
for in some ways, **we are what we have managed to endure,**  
for **our struggles helped us become the best of who we are.**

Seeing Jesus, they're still wondering if he's really alive, vs. 41-43,

While in their joy **they were disbelieving** and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?'  
They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

When they saw that Jesus was eating a fish,

it established that his body was material and real,

and the truth of his physical, bodily resurrection,

**for ghosts and zombies hardly ever eat fish.**

And the question to us as a congregation, Have you anything here to eat?

is there **anything here** for someone who is in need or struggling,

for someone who is feeling lost, anxious, frightened or lonely?

Once they were absolutely convinced of his physical resurrection,

they're ready to hear the full story & biblical connection, vs. 44-47

Then 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, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."

Then **he opened their minds to understand the scriptures**, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

More than just fulfilling ancient prophetic and OT details,

Jesus helped them see God's overall plan for redemption,

God's plan in motion, working out since the beginning,

as all along Jesus had been carrying out God design.

For example, as described in Ezekiel 34:11, 15-16

For thus says the Lord GOD: **I myself** will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. **I myself** will be the shepherd of my sheep, says the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, I will feed them with justice.

The point here is that all these events were foretold in Scripture,

and they were the fulfillment of God's promises of long ago,

and that all of it was a part of God's purpose & plan all along.

Jesus showed them how all of Scripture came together with this,

and how it was all perfectly fulfilled in all that he had done,

**because, it was essential that these disciples fully believe,  
so that they would be able to withstand the coming persecution.**

Those early followers would be rejected, vilified & attacked

by their friends, by their family and by their neighbors.

They would even be expelled from their synagogues.

Under the Roman emperors for the next three centuries,  
faithful Christians would be made scapegoats and outlaws.

They were hunted down, persecuted & killed in the most brutal ways.

They would suffer greatly for the name of Jesus, and  
for their tenacious insistence on his resurrection.

Despite all that they would be suffering, as Jesus explained,

they were called to testify to what they had seen and heard, vs. 46-48

the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Just as the prophet Isaiah had written centuries earlier, vs. 10~11,

You are my witnesses, says the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. ... I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior.

Even a casual reader of the gospels can't miss noticing  
that throughout his earthly ministry, for the most part,  
the disciples were often confused, obtuse and not understanding.

Though they didn't understand his mission before, **now they must,**  
**for now they have a task to accomplish, the mission of the Church.**

**They are challenged to consider the evidence of their experience.**  
**and what do the mighty acts of God in Christ**  
**reveal about the nature and person of God?**

Having personally observed and experienced their risen Lord,  
now they're to bear witness to what they've seen, heard & touched,  
and proclaim with certainty the truth of God's healing grace...  
**... which is our task as a faithful & committed Church of Jesus Christ.**

But, 20 centuries after these events, **how can we really know?**

We can't see or touch Jesus physically or watch him eat fish.

But we do know as an established and documented fact of history  
that the disciples and the early Christian church were so convinced  
that they were willing to suffer persecution and even death,

for despite all persecution, suffering and threats being killed,  
they consistently insisted as truth the resurrection of Jesus.

**No one would endure the terrible persecution that they endured,**  
**unless you were entirely convinced about the resurrection as true.**

We know as historical certainty, they absolutely refused to recant,  
and that they willingly suffered and died for their faith,  
which no one would do for something they didn't really believe...

... which is why Jesus went to such lengths to prove his resurrection –

- see my scars & wounds, touch me, and watch me eat fish,  
for yes it's me and I am physically here, resurrected.

As I see and reflect on this and on God's plan and purpose,  
these eyewitnesses were given all they needed to believe  
which served to strengthen them to endure persecution,  
which at the very least assures us 20 centuries later,  
that they really believed and they were committed --  
**--- which in turn, is most convincing to me.**

So here's the challenge ---  
the Lord is still calling the people of God to witness and testify,  
for it has been passed down to us, the Church, through the ages.

We are in the line of God's servants and beloved ones,  
called to tell and show the world about God and God's truth,  
by what we say, by what we do and proclaim by our attitude,  
by the lives we live and by the people we touch with grace.

Suppose your faith was being challenged, something like  
the veteran at the VA hospital or Jesus in the upper room,  
could you provide evidence that your faith really is alive?

Suppose, you wanted to prove that your Christian faith is real --  
- that your walk with God is a growing and living thing ---  
- that you are the authentic Christian you claim to be ---  
**would you be able to produce enough evidence, to convince?**

Suppose there was a fire and all the church records were lost,  
what would the level of your active participation in the life  
of this congregation say about the consistency of your faith?

Among your family, your friends, your co-workers, fellow students,  
among your neighbors or others who encounter you in daily life,  
which of them could speak on behalf of your faith?

**Who could offer evidence or testimony that your faith is alive,  
and that you really are the true Christian you claim to be,  
and that your way of living is of one who walks with the Lord?**

Truth is, exactly like those earliest disciples in Luke,  
we too are called, not merely to accept, sit back, and survive,  
we too are called & equipped, not merely to believe and exist,  
but we're called to witness, even at a personal cost.

The truth is, God's love and grace, God's mercy and our salvation,

God's forgiveness of our sins, healing & promise of eternal life,

**these are all God's gifts of infinite value and worth,**

**to which as recipients of grace we are to respond.**

And one way or the other, our lives do bear witness before others---

- testifying to the love and grace of God, or else we do not

- testifying that the Gospel matters, or that it does not

-testifying to the living presence of Christ in us.

And for better or worse, our world is watching for our witness,

to see evidence of our faith, of our authentic walk with God,

for we are never **not** giving witness by our living.

Jesus didn't command the world to come to Church,

he commanded his Church to go

and proclaim his gracious love to our world and neighbors.

Each of us has been incredibly blessed with our own stories and gifts,

& no one has ever before nor anyone ever after will be just like us.

We are each one unique & special, placed as God intends,

for a real purpose, goal and satisfying way to serve.

The critical question is this, concerning our faithful response,

are we using our gifts and opportunities well, as God intends?

**The way we choose to respond to God's grace & blessings will determine**

**the growth and depth of our faith, our relationship with the Lord.**

Luigi Tarisio lived from 1790 to 1854.

He was a very successful businessman, made a ton of money,

and loved old violins, though he couldn't play very well.

Over his lifetime he was able to amass an incredible collection –

24 Stradivarius & another 120 Italian masterpiece violins...

... which for the most part he never allowed to be played.

But what is the point or purpose

of a well-made violin that has wonderful sound-qualities,

if it's never played or used to make music?

What is the value or worth of even a Stradivarius violin

if no one ever hears the beautiful sounds it could make?

**Our challenge is this, what are we doing in response**

**to the gracious love and abundant blessings of the Lord?**

To bear witness is to live out our faith with joy and integrity,

as best we can wherever and however Jesus has placed us to serve,

'to bloom our best wherever we have been planted'.

As we have received God's gracious love toward the lost,

so it falls to us, that we go and do more of the same --

You are my witnesses, says the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. ... You are witnesses of these things.