



“Don’t Just Stand There, Do Something”

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Scripture (CEB):

Luke 24:44-53

⁴⁴ Jesus 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 from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. ⁴⁶ He said to them, “This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins, must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ 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.”

⁵⁰ He led them out as far as Bethany, where he lifted his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ As he blessed them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. ⁵² They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem overwhelmed with joy. ⁵³ And they were continuously in the temple praising God.

Sermon:

This final story from the book of Luke could be written another way, it could sound something like this:

Then Jesus, their friend and leader, told his buddies that everything that had happened in the last week, was Ok. Yes, he had been betrayed and left to die by some of his pals; yes, he had been killed on a cross, put in a tomb and left...but it hadn’t ended that way. God had given him life again, a new life totally beyond the touch of death. He told his friends, don’t worry, it’s nothing like a zombie, nothing like that! It’s new life, resurrection life. Life that is greater than death.

In fact, Jesus said, it’s just another sign: of all the things that he had tried to explain about God to others...his rising up in resurrection was another sign of God’s love, God’s grace.

Didn't he spend years telling them stories? There was the one about the kid who left their parents in anger and came back later, miserable and hungry and poor; knowing he had been a jerk..and yet were greeted with love and joy and a dinner party?

How about the story of the one lost sheep? The one lost piece of silver? Remember, the shepherd dropped everything to go find that one dumb, lonely, frightened sheep? The woman in her house, she cleaned it up and down til she found that one lost piece of silver, no matter how small it was...it was worth the hunt.

Jesus told his friends: God is like that. God is love, and care and looking out for each and every person. God leaves no one out. God forgets no one.

Remember all those dinner parties we had, Jesus told his buddies. Everybody was there...not just rich people, or clever people. There were people off the streets, and people who were sick, and people who were totally on the outs with their families, totally on the edge...but everybody was welcome, and everybody got to eat and laugh and relax and be together and safe.

God is like that. That's what Jesus said. That's what he did with his life...try to show those pals of his, that God wants all people, heck, all the world, with animals and plants and seas and forests, fields and factories...God wants all of it to be happy and loved, and feel safe and whole. And God doesn't care if you are straight or gay or trans, if you are rich or poor, sick or well, pretty or not, young or not, smart or not. Jesus called that "the kingdom of God".

And his pals are standing around, looking at Jesus, feeling confused, and guilty and unhappy. Clearly, they are not feeling that "kingdom of God" feeling.

They feel bad, really bad, for having run away when Jesus got arrested. They snuck away when he was killed, they hid from the authorities and stayed holed up in a house for days and days and days. Only the women friends of Jesus went out...they found that Jesus had left the tomb, and told the guys all about it. The girls were the ones who went out and got the groceries. They were braver than any of his pals.

The guys can't get over the fact that Jesus isn't mad at them. Doesn't despise them for being scared, doesn't tell them to get lost because they are all weak, cowardly losers!

So he tells them: don't you get it? God doesn't despise people who are scared, or sad, or confused or weak. God doesn't hate. God tries to show you that you are beautiful inside, capable and loveable and stronger than you know! You have it in you to do wonderful things, good things, have a life of loving and living, with joy and with happiness. That is what God has in mind for you!

God knows you can be ok again. Stop beating yourself up. That's what Jesus says.

And he tells his buddies, I love you and I forgive you for the stuff you did. You are ok. We are ok together.

The scripture says he blesses them by raising his hands. That's what a blessing is; a chance to know that you are loved, even though you aren't perfect. A blessing says you are adorable and huggable.

So, I would rewrite this part to say, "So Jesus hugged them all, looked them in the eye and gave them each a smile, one last time. And then, he was gone."

But they were ok. They were really ok, cause they realized that they weren't a broken up, guilty, miserable mess.

So they went back into town, happy. And they realized, Jesus was the one who made them happy, so they said, "Thanks God, for sending us Jesus to help us get it straight in our heads and in our hearts."

They were no longer timid and scared all the time. They felt so much better! They wanted to tell other people about that!

Finally, they realized that they weren't hated, despised, rejected. They weren't junk. They weren't losers.

God remembered them, loved them, wanted them happy. And that changed their world. It changed how they felt about themselves, and it set them free of self-hate, of guilt, of anger at themselves and everybody else.

Love does that. It fills you up, instead of cutting you down. It gives you hope instead of leaving you in angry hopelessness.

Love does that. It gives you the courage to do new or different, or risky things, because love believes you have it in you, you are strong enough. Love tells you, you are enough.

Years ago, a voice told me that I was ok, that I was loveable, that even my secret inner icky parts that I tried to hide...didn't scare them away.

That voice told me, in my heart and in my head...that I was loved...even my icky parts.

And like those pals of Jesus, who had been hiding out, scared and filled with self-loathing...I had been hiding, too.

But I felt freer, stronger, braver when I knew I was loved by a love that wasn't afraid of me, even my icky parts.

So, I got off my couch, and went to school. I learned what I needed to learn, and I did all sorts of new and scary things, I took my family and moved far away, had challenges and lots of surprises....but it was worth it because that love that told me I was ok, never left me.

And like those disciples of Jesus, like his friends of long ago, I can get going and do something cause I know I am ok. I know I am loved.

That voice that I heard, I hear it still. It is like that final hug and that smile and look in the eye from Jesus.

Or, as the scripture says, it is like that final time Jesus lifted his hands and blessed his friends.

And like those buddies of Jesus, I am full of joy. And I thank God.

We stand around, not knowing what to do, being mad, and sad, and afraid.

But when we get that big hug, when we get that smile that is the smile of a true friend who loves us, a look in the eye that says yes to us, no matter what we have done or been through...

Then, we can get moving.

Then, we don't need to stand around, or hide in the background.

Then, we can get going, and we are able to do something good with our lives, and do good in our lives for others.

Love does that.

God is love.

Jesus showed us that love.

So, yeah, love can get us going, get us moving, get us living. Love can give us the power to do that.

Halleluia!

And amen!