



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Easter 3

April 11, 2021

What the Risen Jesus Does for You

Luke 24:36–49

³⁶ As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸ And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ See 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.” ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, 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 before them.

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 and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ 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.”

I suppose it could be said that our outlook on life, at least in part, is a byproduct of the period of history known as the Enlightenment. In the Enlightenment mankind had finally come of age. We brushed off the vestiges of superstitious thought and came to believe that human beings could do virtually anything they set their minds to. Prior to this humans had generally accepted certain realities, even though we had no visible evidence to support them. Since the Enlightenment our race has come to anchor our beliefs in what can be observed scientifically. Science has an answer for everything, or so we’ve been led to believe.

In the Enlightenment, we also became self-sufficient. We’ve come to esteem in others those qualities that exhibit the power of the human spirit to overcome. Our heroes are the “self-made man,” the “self-starter,” the “self-motivated,” the “self-sufficient.” I even read an article sometime back attacking the Cinderella character as one who was too spineless to overcome her own problems.

And so, we live each day in this sort of environment, this philosophical climate, in which the world around us exalts the self and diminishes the need for others. Even our Christian work ethic moves us to accept, at least in part, the flawed proverb (attributed to



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Benjamin Franklin) that “God helps those who help themselves.” We strive not to be dependent on *anyone* or *anything*, because dependence is considered, at least by my generation, to be a serious character flaw.

And yet, there is One who places us precisely into the seat of dependence. There is One who teaches us that our very life is defined, not in self, but in Him who loved us when we were unlovable, who carried our cross when we couldn’t bear it ourselves, who gave us life when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, who says to us: “If you are not dependent on Me, you have no part in My everlasting kingdom.” Indeed, there is One who takes us back to those pre-Enlightenment days, when we believed what God’s Word implanted in our hearts – namely, that Jesus is our Lord, that His will for us is perfect, that His salvation is complete, and that His Word is, in all its parts, beyond reproach.

But, we see in today’s Gospel that depending on Jesus is the most reasonable thing for us to do, for we see here four distinct things that the risen Christ did for His disciples and continues to do for His disciples to this very day. So, let us proceed to answer the question: What does the risen Jesus do for *you*?

Well . . . First, He dispels your superstitious thoughts. Luke writes: “They were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit” (v. 37). When the risen Jesus first appeared to His disciples, they really didn’t know what to think. Is this a spirit!!!!? Is it a ghost!!!? Are we done for? They knew Jesus had died – they’d heard Him cry out His last words as He committed His spirit to His Father in heaven, they’d seen His lifeless body taken down from the cross, they’d watched Him being carried away to be laid in stone-cold grave.

But now they were seeing Him *again* . . . and they thought He was a ghost. Now, God had already taught His people not to fear such things as spirits or ghosts, that there’s no communication or contact between the living and the dead. But here they are, overcome by superstition, and Jesus calms them by assuring them that He is in fact real. He’s not a spirit or a ghost. “See My hands and My feet,” He says. “Touch Me and see.” He was real! He was flesh and blood! He had truly risen! And with that touch of His body their superstitions abated, for He was alive – truly, physically alive.

Now, I know we’d like to think otherwise, enlightened people that we are, but our hearts are plagued by all sorts of superstitions, too. We fear things that we have no business fearing, for our Lord Jesus is risen from the grave, in body and soul. And we, too, look to this risen Jesus, this One who is both divine and human, who is flesh and blood, the One on whom we are so dependent, to dispel *our* superstitious thoughts and fears. To His disciples He said, “Handle Me and see.” To you and me, He says, “Take, eat, this is My body.” Beloved, this is real! Jesus truly is risen and is truly here today, in flesh and blood, given for you! Jesus has attached Himself to physical elements we can see and feel, and thereby dispels our superstitious thoughts and fears, just like He did for the apostles all those years ago.



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Secondly, He controls the emotions that can get in the way of faith. Luke says: “And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’” (v. 41). Emotions are funny things. They aren’t the essence of faith, but they certainly play a part in it. In the resurrection of Jesus we’re called to joy and happiness, we’re called to “lift up our hearts,” to celebrate what His victory over death and the grave means for us. We’re *chosen* people, not *frozen* people. Emotions of faith are a good thing.

But, emotions are not the standard or foundation of faith. In fact, they can be a downright detriment to faith. The risen Jesus, once again intervened in the lives of His disciples, for they were – for a time – overcome by joy and astonishment. Luke says, “They still disbelieved for joy and were marveling.” Their emotions got in the way of their faith! Jesus brought them back to faith by assuring them again of the reality of His physical, bodily resurrection. “Have you anything here to eat?” He said. He didn’t need to eat, of course, but He *did* eat to calm those emotions that had gotten in the way of His disciples’ faith.

He does the same for you, beloved. His Word does not change. It’s an anchor in an otherwise turbulent sea of emotions. Faith comes by hearing that Word, Scripture says. God sees to it that your faith rests, not on the way you feel, but on the One who is risen from the grave, who reigns over heaven and earth, who graces you with His Word and Sacraments, that you might have an undying faith in Him.

Thirdly, He continues to grant you the forgiveness of your sins. We read in verse 47: “That repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” It seems, at times, like a redundant message, I know, but you need this assurance, beloved, and to have it, it must be preached over and over. So here it comes again: The same God who calls you to repentance freely gives you His forgiveness through faith in Christ. In Christ you are declared not guilty of all sins, for Jesus was found guilty in your place. There is no sin He has not atoned for. There is no guilt He has not carried. There is no punishment He has not already suffered. These things, like Jesus’ resurrected body, are real, for Jesus commanded them to be preached to all nations.

Finally, He calls you to be His witnesses. “You are witnesses of these things,” He says. And who better to be a witness to the grace and mercy of God than those who’ve received that grace and mercy so abundantly? You are His witness, my friend, for you are one who confesses your complete and total dependence on Him.

The Enlightenment taught us to believe that we belong to ourselves, that we are the “self-sufficient” heroes we so admire. But, Jesus’ resurrection refutes that sort of thinking. Quite to the contrary, we desperately need this risen Jesus in our lives to dispel our fearful superstitions, to control the emotions that get in the way of our faith, to forgive our sins, and to call us to a life of witness, to give purpose and meaning to our lives. Oh, how we need this One who places us precisely into the seat of dependence, who teaches us that our life is defined, not in self, but in the One who loved us when we were unlovable, who



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carried our cross when we couldn't bear it ourselves, and who gave us life when we were dead in our trespasses and sins. Yes, there is One who takes us back to those pre-Enlightenment days, when we believed what God's Word instilled in our hearts. His name is Jesus. He is our Savior and our Lord. His will for us is perfect, His salvation is complete, and His Word is, in all its parts, beyond reproach. In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.