



Tolstoy once told a story of a Czar and Czarina who wished to honor the members of their court with a banquet. They sent out invitations and requested that the guests come with the invitations in their hands. When they arrived at the banquet the guests were surprised to discover that the guards did not look at their invitations at all. Instead they examined their hands. The guests wondered about this, but they were also curious to see who the Czar and Czarina would choose as the guest of honor to sit between them at the banquet. They were flabbergasted to see that it was the old scrub woman who had worked to keep the palace clean for years. The guards, having examined her hands, declared, "You have the proper credentials to be the guest of honor. We can see your love and loyalty in your hands."

A similar story is told of the great missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson. Judson went to the King of Burma to ask him if he might have permission to go to a certain city to preach. The King, a pagan, but quite an intelligent man responded, "I'm willing for a dozen preachers to go but not you, not with those hands. My people are not such fools as to take notice of your preaching but they will note those calloused, work scarred hands."

After his crucifixion, the disciples of Jesus were trying to sort out the meaning of the reports they had been receiving about appearances of the risen Christ. It was most confusing to them. Was it a hoax? They were not completely immune to superstition. Perhaps it was some kind of ghost. Suddenly it happened. Jesus himself stood among them. The disciples were startled and frightened. Then Jesus said to them, "Why are you troubled and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself..." The response of the disciples is a sermon in itself. Luke tells us that they "disbelieved for joy..." It was simply too wonderful to be true. He was alive and he was with them right there. No wonder they had difficulty believing. Some persons still have that problem today. Many desperately want to believe but something holds them back. "See my hands and my feet..."

I. It Is Difficult to Believe God Cares That Much.

In the first place, some of us have difficulty believing that God really cares about us that much. Some of us are more comfortable with an impersonal God who is the First Cause, the Ground of Being, a Source of life and power but not of personality. The idea of God with nailprints in his hands and feet because of his great love for us is an idea we are not ready for.

Some years ago the papers were full of a story about the death of seventy-eight people in New Delhi, India. There had been a bus accident and in the bus had been two castes of Indians. A man tied a rope to a tree, and all eleven "untouchables" climbed out to safety. But seventy-eight Indians died because they would not use the same rope that had been used by the "untouchables." (1) How outrageous are the claims of the Gospel. The divine Creator of all that lives and moves and has its being, came down to earth and suffered and died to say to us that no one on this earth is untouchable. No one is beyond his love and concern. There is a beautiful story about the courtship of Moses Mendelssohn, the grandfather of the great German composer. Moses Mendelssohn was a small man with a misshapen, humped back. One day he visited a merchant in

Hamburg who had a lovely daughter. Though Mendelssohn admired her greatly, she avoided him, seemingly afraid of his grotesque hump.

On the last day of his visit he went to tell her goodbye. Her face seemed to beam with beauty but when he entered, she cast her eyes to the floor. Mendelssohn's heart ached for her. After some small talk, he slowly drew to the subject that filled his mind. "Do you believe that marriages are made in Heaven?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the young woman. "And do you?"

"Of course," Mendelssohn answered. "I believe that at the birth of each child, the Lord says, 'That boy shall marry that girl.' But in my case, the Lord also added, 'But alas, his wife will have a terrible hump.'

"At that moment I called, 'Oh Lord, that would be a tragedy for her. Please give me the humped back and let her be beautiful.'"

We are told that the young woman was so moved by these words that she reached for Mendelssohn's hand and later became his loving and faithful wife.

In trying to deal with the meaning of the cross on which Christ died, the early church came to understand that those nailprints in the hands and feet of the Master should have been ours. But God so loved the world that he sent his own Son to bear the burden brought about by the iniquity of us all. Can you deal with that? Can you believe that God really cares about us that much?

II. It Is Difficult to Believe Life Goes on Beyond the Tomb.

In the second place, there are others of us who have difficulty believing that life really goes on beyond the tomb. It simply is too wonderful to believe that there is a world beyond this one another existence in which that which dies here is resurrected to new life there. Yet such a conviction is at the heart of our faith.

There is another beautiful love story. It concerns the love of Paul Tournier, one of the world's most beloved and respected Christian doctors, for his wife Nelly. In one of his books, Tournier describes how he and Nelly were able to talk about death after her first serious bout with coronary thrombosis while they were in Greece. She knew how gravely ill she was and that a second attack could leave her severely handicapped or could even be fatal. Their last month together was a time of intimate sharing. On the last day she said to him, "Perhaps it would have been better if I had died of my heart attack a month ago."

Tournier responded, "And yet my Greek colleagues have done a good job. They saved your life. You are glad of that." "Yes, of course," she said, "if I can get back to Geneva and see my children and grandchildren." She was silent for a moment, and then added, "But if I had died, I should be in heaven now, and I should be meeting your parents."

Tournier was touched by this. He writes, "You see, she also married my expectation of heaven!"

He replied to her, "Well, when you arrive in heaven, my parents will thank you for having been the wife that you have been for their son."

It was to be Tournier's last words to her. A moment later she put her hand on her heart and exclaimed, "That's it!" He asked, "Are you sure?" She answered "Yes." And she was in heaven.(2) The world simply cannot deal with that kind of expectation. Without the Easter faith not only death but life itself is ultimately meaningless. What value is there in love that ends beside a grave?

I am reminded of a Jonathan Winter's satire sometime back on the funeral business. Winters played the enterprising owner of a Funeral Home a "full service" establishment that boasted of a cemetery with such things as underwater plots for those who had spent their lives in aquatic endeavors, a simulated construction site for those who were in the building business, a hospital-like crypt for those in the medical profession, and so on.

The crisis began when the cemetery began to run out of space. Somehow they needed, in the words of Winter's character, "to get rid of all those stiff." Finally he hit upon it. He would place them in the nose cone of a "burial rocket and launch them into outer space." The idea worked! The government, the military, and his clients went for it. The movie ends with the President of the United States and assorted dignitaries holding their hands over their hearts while a corpse is being blasted into outer space. Cannons boom and a band plays. The last line of the movie is delivered by Winter's character. He looks to heaven and shouts, "Resurrection now" as the rocket thunders into the clouds. (3) That is all the nonbelieving world can do with death - ridicule it, deny it, avoid talking about it. But not those who have seen the hands and feet of the risen Savior. He is alive and because he lives so shall we live!

III. We Have Trouble Processing the Implications of These Truths.

Many persons cannot believe God really loves us that much. Many cannot believe that life really does go on beyond the grave. Even more significantly, most people do not want to deal with the implications of those two truths. What does it mean if there really is a God who is that intimately concerned about our lives? What does it mean if this life really is but a prelude to everlasting life? Paul Tournier says it meant two things to his life. First of all, about the age of twelve or thirteen he said privately, on his own, "Lord Jesus, I dedicate my life to you." He writes, "Of course, I did not fully realize the significance of that and I said nothing about it to anyone. But Jesus took that naive child's hand and gradually led me to an understanding of what that dedication meant."

Secondly, Tournier's consciousness of eternity led him to his career as a doctor. His talents were in the field of mathematics, but he concluded that the world would never miss having one less mathematician. He wanted to give his life to helping others. He writes, "Of course I realize now that a mathematician is as useful to the world as a doctor. But the thing that counted, in my simplicity, was the idea of service." A dedication to Christ and determination to give his life in service to others. That is the difference the thought of eternity made in Paul Tournier's life.

The same kind of thing happened in the lives of those first disciples. From frightened and uncertain men marked by doubt and envy, they became apostles of great courage and self-giving. How about you? What difference has been made in your life by seeing the hands and feet of the risen Christ? Has it caused you to take more seriously your walk with the Man of Galilee? Has it had some effect on the goals you have set for your life? After all, if life is indeed eternal, some of our goals are going to seem awfully shortsighted and self-serving, are they not? Harold Kushner

tell about a young man who left home to find fame and fortune in Hollywood. He had three dreams when he set out to see his name in lights, to own a Rolls Royce, and to marry a beauty contest winner. By the time he was thirty, he had done all three, and he was a deeply depressed young man, unable to work creatively anymore despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that all of his dreams had come true. By thirty, he had run out of goals. What was there for him to do with the rest of his life? Those who have seen the hands and feet of the risen Christ and live their lives in the light of eternity never run out of a purpose for life. "See my hands and my feet..." God really does love us that much. Life really does go on beyond the tomb. What is your response to those two great truths?

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1. George F. Regas, KISS YOURSELF AND HUG THE WORLD (Waco: Word Books, 1987).
 2. Paul Tournier, A LISTENING EAR (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984).
 3. Gerald Mann, WHY DOES JESUS MAKE ME NERVOUS?
Dynamic Preaching, Collected Sermons, by King Duncan

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Today's Gospel reading is an Easter account from the *Gospel of Luke*. It begins with the events that took place on the evening of Easter Sunday after Jesus had appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. You remember the disciples were walking and talking when a stranger caught up to them and joined their conversation. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" One of them, said in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?...The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people; how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see." Then, you remember, the stranger explained scripture to them. He then ate with them and broke the bread and wine as He did at the Last Supper. After this He disappeared, and they realized that this was Jesus. Their hearts were on fire. They ran to Jerusalem to tell Peter and the apostles that they had seen the Lord.

Today's Gospel begins right after this, with the two disciples gathered together with the Twelve telling them their experience. Jesus again appears. This time everyone recognizes Him, but thinks He is a ghost. So Jesus showed them His hands and feet and told them to touch Him. He even ate a piece of fish to prove that He was not a ghost. He explained the scriptures leading to this moment and said, "Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

"You are witnesses of these things." He called His disciples to be witnesses. He calls us to be His witnesses.

In a court of law, at least in America, when someone is called to be a witness, that person has to swear that he or she will tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. We, the witnesses of Jesus Christ, are called to give testimony that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. We are called to testify that there is more to life than the physical, there is the spiritual. We are called to proclaim that Jesus Christ came, suffered, died and rose from the dead so that we could have a share in His eternal life.

The world needs to hear our testimony. The world needs to hear that there is so much more around us than the every day concerns of our lives, or for us Americans, our country. The 24/7 news reports from the left and from the right provide us with incessant whining regarding the statements and actions of those with opposite views. It makes it seem as though the world will stop if the views opposite their position

are allowed to take hold on the country and the world. Because there are few people of faith on either side in the media, they miss that all their reports pale in comparison to the only news that matters, the Good News, the Gospel. Jesus Christ has saved the world. He has given us eternal life. We have to treasure this life, and lead others to His life. We have to take a stand for all that is right and moral whether it comes from the liberals or the conservatives, and we have to fight against all that which is wrong and immoral whether it exists among the liberals or conservatives. The bottom line of our concern is not either of the parties positions. The bottom line for us is the Truth of Jesus Christ. Every position in politics, every law in the land, must be seen from the perspective of the Truth of Jesus Christ.

Who is there in this country who is going to stand up for what is right and true, just and moral? Who? We, that's who. We are witnesses to Jesus Christ. We are witnesses to His Truth. It is our obligation to apply the Christian litmus test to the events of the world.

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

-- St. Teresa of Avila

If only people realized that there was so much more to life than meets the eye, if only people realized that the spiritual is real, if only people realized that the eternal life of the Lord is available for them, that the Lord is reaching out to them, then they would realize that much of their upset in politics as well as in their daily lives is insignificant next to the overwhelming truth of Jesus Christ.

Someone must be found to let the world know about the only reality that matters. This is what we have been called to do. We are His witnesses.

III

A little girl asked her mother, "Mom, how did the human race appear?"

The mother answered, "Well, first God made Adam and Eve and then they had children, and so on . . ."

Two days later the girl asked her father the same question. The father answered, "Many years ago there were monkeys from which the human race evolved."

The confused girl returned to her mother and said, "Mom, how is it possible that you told me the human race was created by God, and Dad said we developed from monkeys?"

The mother answered, "Well, dear, it is very simple. I told you about my side of the family and your father told you about his."

One of the questions that divides the Christian community is, "Where did we come from? How did we get here? Is there a God who set it all in place?"

For some Christians this is not an issue. The biblical description of creation is all they need. "God said it and I believe it!" But there are many Christians who need to deal with science in an open and honest way. I'm not going to deal with Creationism vs. evolution today. But I do want to address those of you who need more than a biblical explanation. And I do want you to understand that the more I know about science the deeper my faith in Christ becomes.

There are many things we believe in this world that we haven't seen. As children we learned that the earth is round. We've never traveled into space and looked back at the earth but we believe what we have been taught.

It was the ancient Greeks who first theorized that the earth is round. This discovery is attributed to Pythagoras who first proposed it sometime around 500 B.C. "Earth is a sphere floating in space," he declared to a packed lecture hall.

It is said that a grave silence fell upon the hall when he said this. His listeners were amazed. They wondered how they could live on a sphere! Common sense suggested that earlier philosophers were right when they said the earth was a flat disc floating on the air. Pythagoras had deduced the idea of a round earth based on his observation that earth casts a circular shadow on the moon during eclipses. (1)

His revolutionary idea was accepted by Aristotle and other Greek philosophers and became common knowledge as early as 300 B.C. Most of the rest of humanity, though, had to accept it on faith. It has only been within our own lifetime that human beings have escaped the earth's magnetic field and ventured out into space and affirmed that Pythagoras was right. The world is round.

Of course, there are still some people who belong to the Flat Earth Society. They believe from their own limited experience that the idea that the earth is a sphere is preposterous. Of course, some people still contend that humans have not landed on the moon. That it was all a

government hoax. I have no idea what to do with such folks, but most of us have accepted the truths of science from an early age. We believe even though we have not seen.

Scientists tell us that life began to emerge on earth as early as 3.5 billion years ago. That is amazing. They also tell us that our earth is rotating on its axis at 1100 miles per hour; that our earth is rotating around the sun at 481,000 mph; and that our sun and solar system are whirling into space at 57,000,000 mph. Wow! It would take quite a leap of faith to believe all that, but people I know and trust tell me it's true, and thus I believe that, yes, it is all likely true.

Furthermore, they tell us this universe is enormous. Now this isn't mere conjecture. For four decades two Voyager space crafts have been hurtling beyond the edge of our solar system at a rate of 100,000 miles per hour. These space craft have been speeding away from earth and are now approximately 12 billion miles from this small planet. When these craft were still responding to signals at about 9 billion miles away engineers would beam commands to them at the speed of light. It took these commands thirteen hours to arrive, even at the speed of light! It is estimated that to send a message to the edge of our enormous universe at the speed of light would take 15 billion years. And within this enormous universe there are billions and billions of galaxies. (2)

That's more than I can get my mind around, but isn't it a magnificent thought that we live in such an amazing universe? Is there anyone in this room who believes that such a magnificent universe could just have happened with no guiding hand at work? Are you mad?

British astrophysicist Fred Hoyle compares the likelihood of life appearing on earth by accident as equivalent to the possibility that a tornado sweeping through a junkyard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the materials found there. (3) An accident? I don't think so.

There is a story about a caveman who was out hunting one day and found a modern-day watch. He noticed this strange looking object on the ground making a ticking sound. Looking at the face of the watch, he saw the hands go around. Opening the inside, he saw a system with order. At that time, he didn't know what it was but he said, "If this is a watch, there must be a watchmaker."

And that is the way most of us respond to this amazing universe. Without a watchmaker, there could be no watch. And without Supreme Intelligence, there could be no universe. There is no way this world with all its immensity and intricacy and beauty could simply have happened. Even a caveman could see that.

Do you remember Thornton Wilder's classic play *Our Town*? There is a scene in it where Jane Crofut gets a letter from her minister when she is sick. The envelope is addressed like this: "Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God."

That's right the mind of God. That is where it all began. Science can tell us how it happened, but only faith can tell us why it happened.

A father told of taking his family to the Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado. He said the sky seemed more brilliant than they had ever seen it, and the stars were so close you felt as if you could touch them.

Their three boys decided that they would put their sleeping bags out on the ground so they could go to sleep watching the stars. The man and his wife had just settled down for the night when their youngest boy came into the tent, dragging his sleeping bag with him.

"What is the matter?" his parents asked. "Is it getting too cold?"

"No," he answered. Then he added, "I just never knew I was so small." (4)

Well, it does make us feel small. But it also reminds us of how great and wonderful God is. Even if you were determined to be an agnostic, you would still be left with mysteries that science cannot answer: The first of these is the creation of the universe itself: that there should be something rather than nothing is miraculous. The second is that, once upon a time, some of the inanimate matter on this earth planet suddenly came to life. And the third is that some of that matter that came to life gained the ability to think, to be motivated, to seek, and to imagine, even to hope. (5)

Even if you weren't impressed by the immensity and the intricacy of it all, the wondrous beauty of creation alone should show the sheer lunacy of believing it all happened by pure chance. "Nature," wrote Jonathan Edwards, "is God's greatest evangelist." And he was right.

That is one of the reasons you and I are in this room today. **We can't imagine a universe such as ours coming into being without some Intelligent Being saying, "Let there be light."** Whether it happened in seven days or whether it happened over billions of years is irrelevant. It happened because God caused it to happen.

But there is another reason we are here. **It is because two thousand years ago in Jerusalem a man named Jesus rose from the grave.**

Oh, we weren't there. We didn't see it with our own eyes. But there were a host of people, reliable people, who did see it. Listen to their testimony.

In today's lesson from Luke's Gospel we discover that when Jesus was seen after he was resurrected from the dead, some of his closest friends reacted with shock and disbelief. They thought he was a ghost. They wanted to touch him and hold him. We can't blame them. How could he be resurrected from the dead?

United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcano tells about a parishioner in a church she once served who had not seen his family in over 20 years. There had been conflict. He had been hurt and decided to leave home and never return. More than 20 years later he had a change of heart knowing that he needed reconciliation with his family. He gathered up all his emotional strength and returned home. His mother and sisters, who had not had any word from him during the long period of separation and had on occasion even wondered whether he was dead, responded like the early followers of Jesus who first saw him after his resurrection.

When the man arrived at his home the family was startled and fearful. They had not expected to ever see him again and they remembered the conflict that had separated them. Was it really him? Was he back for revenge? They wondered. But finally, their pain became joy, the joy of disbelief this son and brother was alive and had returned to them. Throughout their visit the mother and sisters would say to him, "We can't believe it's you," and would touch him and hug him for a sense of verification that it was him. (6)

That's the way his disciples reacted to the risen Christ. They wanted to touch him and feel where the nails pierced his flesh. These disciples needed proof he was alive. If he were merely a bodiless apparition, it would be too easy to dismiss his appearance as a mass psychosis brought on by their grief. But they touched his hands and his feet and his sword-pierced side. He even ate a meal with

them. He was no ghost. He was the risen Christ. Of this they had no doubt. You can see that from what happened next.

Christ gives them their mission. He says to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Then he opens their minds so they can understand the Scriptures. He tells them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

Note that: they are to be his witnesses. And what witnesses they became. They were fearless. No matter how hard the religious and the political authorities tried to squelch their fast growing movement they would not recant their faith.

We're told that the word Luke uses here translated as "witness" is a unique word in Greek. It has two or three meanings. Initially, it simply meant someone who was an eyewitness, who saw something happen with their own eyes. In that sense, the disciples were definitely witnesses. However, it can also mean someone who might not have seen something happen with their own eyes, but who nonetheless believes strongly enough that the event happened that they are willing to tell others about it. Paul is called a witness even though he wasn't present for Jesus' actual ministry. You and I also fit into this category.

But there's a third meaning for witness as well in the New Testament, and it's the one that applies the most. We get the word "martyr" from the Greek word for witness. It even sounds like it "martus." As you know, a martyr is someone who was killed for their convictions, for their witness. The Greeks understood the connection between martyrdom and being a witness. So did the disciples. We don't know exactly how the disciples died. Most of the stories come from tradition, not from scripture. But we do know that, of all the disciples, none of them died a natural death. (7)

That is why we know that their witness is reliable. Nobody dies for something that they know is not true. People with a second-hand faith might be reluctant to give their lives. After all, they might have a degree of uncertainty. They weren't there. They simply heard a report from

people they trusted. But the disciples were there. They spoke with absolute certainty. They saw nail scarred hands. They spoke with him and ate with him. And, eventually, they died for him. There can be no doubt of their reliability.

Chuck Colson says it better than anyone else. For our younger worshippers, Chuck Colson went to prison as part of the infamous Watergate burglary and subsequent cover-up during the presidency of Richard Nixon. Colson was part a determined conspiracy to cover up a crime committed by high government officials. Colson says:

"The Watergate cover-up reveals the true nature of humanity. Even political zealots at the pinnacle of power will, in the crunch, save their own necks, even at the expense of the ones they profess to serve so loyally. But the apostles could not deny Jesus because they had seen Him face to face, and they knew He had risen from the dead. No, you can take it from an expert in cover-ups I've lived through Watergate that nothing less than a resurrected Christ could have caused those men to maintain to their dying whispers that Jesus is alive and is Lord. Two thousand years later, nothing less than the power of the risen Christ could inspire Christians around the world to remain faithful despite prison, torture, and death." (8)

It's a matter of faith. But that doesn't mean we have turned our minds off and accepted as truth something that is appealing but without substance. Just as we accept the teachings of science, no matter how incredible, because we accept the witness of authorities we trust so we accept the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ because we accept the testimony of reliable witnesses. And now we seek to be reliable witnesses as well. "He lives," says the old Gospel hymn. "He lives! Christ Jesus lives today . . . You ask me how I know he lives, he lives within my heart." That's the best evidence there is of the resurrection. Won't you open your heart and let the risen Christ take residence in your heart today?

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2. Philip Yancey, *Prayer*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).
3. Lee Strobel, *The Case For Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).
4. *Reader's Digest*.
5. William B. Irvine, *On Desire: Why We Want What We Want* (Kindle Edition).
6. http://day1.org/852-the_good_news_is_for_everyone.
7. The Rev. J. Curtis Goforth, O.S.L., <http://revgoforth.wordpress.com/sermons-on-luke/luke-2436b-48>.
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IV

Karl Barth, one of the twentieth century's most famous theologians, was on a streetcar one day in Basel, Switzerland, where he lived and lectured. A tourist to the city climbed on the streetcar and sat down next to Barth. The two men started chatting with each other. "Are you new to the city?" Barth inquired.

"Yes," said the tourist.

"Is there anything you would particularly like to see in this city?" asked Barth.

"Yes," he said, "I'd love to meet the famous theologian Karl Barth. Do you know him?"

Barth replied, "Well as a matter of fact, I do. I give him a shave every morning."

The tourist got off the streetcar quite delighted. He went back to his hotel saying to himself, "I met Karl Barth's barber today." (1)

That amuses me. That tourist was in the presence of the very person he most wanted to meet, but even with the most obvious clue, he never realized that the man with whom he was talking was the great man himself.

It reminds me of Mary's reaction on Easter morning. In her grief, she thinks the man she is speaking to is the gardener. It is not, of course. Until he called her name she did not realize that she was speaking with the risen Christ.

And, of course, it reminds me of that scene on the road to Emmaus, when later that same Easter day, two of the disciples walk for a while with the resurrected Jesus, and they, too, had no idea with whom they were conversing.

Each of the Gospel writers tells the Easter story in a different way. For many of us this fact adds a note of authenticity to these ancient stories. These were the jumbled reports of eye-witnesses to the most dramatic moment in human history, when Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead. These were not carefully crafted works of fiction. No one tried to reconcile the differing accounts. They had no desire to convince us these events happened, only to report what they had experienced.

In Luke's account, on that first Easter Sunday, the women took spices and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the mouth of the tomb, but they didn't find Christ's body. Two angels ask them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!"

When they returned from the tomb, they told all these things to the disciples, but, says Luke, the disciples did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. So, except for the testimony of the women, things were not quite resolved that first Easter morning.

That is why the story of the two men on the road to Emmaus is so important to Luke's description of the first Easter. Evidently the two men were among those to whom the women shared their story of the empty tomb. These men were on their way to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. We don't know precisely who these men were. The name of one of them was "Cleopas." It has been suggested that the other was Luke himself, and that he omitted his own name out of modesty. We simply do not know.

And we do not know why they were headed toward Emmaus. Perhaps that was their home. Maybe, in disappointment, they had concluded that their grand adventure of following Jesus of Nazareth was over, so they were packing it in and heading back to the lives they had before they met the Master.

We don't know why they were headed to Emmaus. What we do know is that, as they walked and talked with each other about their experiences, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but, Luke tells us, they were both kept from recognizing him.

That's interesting, don't you think? They had been followers of the Master, but now he is walking along with them and they do not recognize him. **Maybe, as with Mary, their despair stood in the way their disappointment with the way things turned out.** That can happen. You lose hope, you discard your dreams, and you are blinded to the good things that still surround you.

Pastor and author Leith Anderson, as a boy, grew up outside of New York City. During those years he was an avid fan of the old Brooklyn Dodgers. One day his father took him to a World Series game between the Dodgers and the Yankees. Anderson was so excited, and he just knew the Dodgers would trounce the Yankees. Unfortunately, the Dodgers never got on base, and his excitement was shattered.

Years later he was engrossed in a conversation with a man whom he describes as "a walking sports almanac." Leith told this man about attending this World Series game and added, "It was such a disappointment. I was a Dodger's fan and the Dodgers never got on base."

The man said, "You were there? You were at the game when Don Larsen pitched the first perfect game in all of World Series history?"

"Yeah," Anderson replied, "but uh, we lost." He then realized that he had been so caught up in his team's defeat that he missed out on the fact that he was a witness to a far greater event the first perfect game in World Series history.

Leith Anderson writes, "I wonder how often the same thing happens to us. We get so caught up in the 'defeats' in our lives, the times when things don't turn out the way we want them to. So we're depressed because an illness continues to linger, or when people don't treat us the way we think they ought to, or when we face financial difficulties. But we are often so blinded by the pain and disappointment of our 'defeat' that we fail to appreciate the fact that we might be witness to something far greater that God is doing in our lives." (2)

Those are wise words. Don't let temporary disappointments blind you to the good God is doing in your life. Don't assume that any disappointment is God's last word on any situation.

The followers of Jesus certainly thought their dreams had turned to dust. The last thing they expected was to discover that Christ was alive. Perhaps this is why they did not recognize him. They were blinded by their disappointment.

Or maybe it was deliberate on the Master's part. Maybe he wasn't ready to reveal himself to them at this point. We don't know. But it is evident this stranger was preparing these two men for an astounding revelation.

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. Cleopas asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" the stranger asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

Then this stranger begins to admonish the two followers of Jesus. He says to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

Then we come to one of the most beautiful passages in Scripture: “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’

“They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.’ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.”

It’s a beautiful story of two men who were in Christ’s presence and didn’t even know it until he chose to reveal himself.

There may be someone in this room today who is distracted from your faith by a great disappointment or defeat. Maybe you, too, are blinded by your circumstances. You do not even know that, when you are in this room, you too are in the presence of the risen Christ. “For where two or three gather in my name,” says the Master in Matthew 18:20, “there am I with them.”

John Calvin once said that the Bible is like a pair of eye glasses. Think about that for a moment. The Bible is not a spiritual encyclopedia where we go to have all our questions answered. With years of studying the Bible we may never come to a sufficient understanding of why we have disappointments and defeats. There is much in our world and much in our faith that we do not understand. Understanding is not the key to life, however. Faith is. Trust in God is. God’s eyeglasses don’t allow us to see why we are going through a certain situation, but they do allow us to see what step we should take next and they assure us that whatever the future holds, the One who holds the future will never forget us nor forsake us.

You’ve heard the expression that “seeing is believing.” Most of you have also heard the converse of that that there are some things that have to be believed to be seen. This is true as well. There are two ways to look at life. One is through the eyes of skepticism and doubt. The other is through the eyes of faith and hope. The only people to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection were his followers people who already believed in him. In other words, you had to believe in order to see. This is a powerful lesson about the nature of faith.

Author Nelson Searcy tells of visiting Disney World with his son some years ago. It was a magical time for them. What they did not realize until it was time to leave the theme park is that the people who first designed the Disney theme parks did something quite creative. They hid discreet images of Mickey Mouse throughout all of the Disney parks and various attractions.

The images are simple three connected, intersecting circles that look like the outline of Mickey's head and ears but they are everywhere. They are etched into pavement, painted on the walls of rides, built into the fences, and arranged in the landscaping. Look for them the next time you are in a Disney park.

Disney World is jam-packed with these subtle Hidden Mickeys, but most people don't see them because they don't know to look for them. Searcy and his son sure didn't. They learned about the Hidden Mickeys just as they were leaving. However, simple awareness is a powerful thing. When Searcy and his son said their final good-bye to Dumbo after learning about these Hidden Mickeys and headed toward the parking lot tram, they started seeing hidden Mickeys everywhere. They began popping out of the woodwork, literally. They had been at the park all day without seeing a single Hidden Mickey, but as soon as they became aware of their existence, they realized they had been surrounded by them all along. (3)

There are some things that must be believed to be seen. So it is with the life of faith. When something happens, either good or bad, some people see a mere incident, or perhaps, a remarkable coincidence. Others, however, see a miracle or the hand of God. It makes a difference whether you are seeing through the eyes of faith or the eyes of skepticism.

The amazing thing is how often when you are looking through the eyes of faith you see the handiwork of God. Seeing His handiwork, in turn, increases your faith and your awareness of God's presence.

I believe it was no accident that Jesus had these two men on the road to Emmaus recount all the events of the week just past. He wanted them to focus on all they had been through together and all he had meant to them so that they would be prepared for him to reveal himself to them. I believe that is the value of gathering each week in worship to put on once more the glasses of faith. I have not a doubt that those who make the effort to be here every week see God's hand at work in their lives much, much more than those who are casual in their worship. That's the way it works. In order to see Christ, you need to believe in him, and you need to be regularly in Christ's presence.

[I also suspect it was no coincidence that these two men became aware of Christ's presence when they broke bread together. "This is my body which was broken for you," they had heard the Master say. And people have discovered Christ in their midst for 2,000 years every time the bread is broken and the cup is shared in Holy Communion. That is why I invite you to receive his body and his blood this day . . .]

Put on the glasses of faith. Take off the glasses of skepticism and doubt and life will take on new meaning and new wonder. Even those who were closest to him did not recognize him until they shook off their disappointment and despair. But when they put on the glasses of faith and realized he was in their midst, their hearts burned within them in joy and peace that the Lord Jesus Christ was alive.

1. John Ross, Surrey, England, *Leadership*, Vol. 8, no. 4.

2. <http://message.snopes.com/showthread.php?t=12654>.

3. Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Dykes Henson, *The Greatness Principle: Finding Significance and Joy by Serving Others* (Kindle edition).