



Resurrection Reorientation

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Luke 24:36-48

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After college, I went into campus ministry for eight years, including a year in Russia, followed by three years in seminary. I felt my education and experience gave me a solid orientation for pastoral ministry.

But before I could be ordained, I had to spend a quarter in clinical pastoral education at a hospital. This is an immersion experience into crisis situations to learn how to come alongside others in meaningful and helpful ways. Along with talking with and supporting patients and their families, we also spent time reflecting on our experience by writing and processing what we were learning with a supervisor and in a group setting. In this experience, you see a lot of pain and a lot of lives changed forever.

This experience was challenging for me as I grappled with people whose hopes and dreams for their future were smashed by crisis. And then my own life began to unravel through a series of circumstances including having to wait eighteen months after seminary before receiving a call to ministry. I had moved from a season of orientation to a season of disorientation.

I would have never chosen this season of disorientation, but I now see this as one of the most transformational times in my life. I became aware that I didn't know what I didn't know, and I had a lot to learn about God, myself, and life

itself before I could move from disorientation to a place of reorientation.

I share my experience because I think we all go through seasons of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. Jesus' disciples had a time of orientation as they followed Jesus, listening to his teaching and preaching, and watching him do miracles. They learned what it meant to follow Jesus as the Messiah and live in the kingdom of God here and now.

But their understanding of what it meant for him to be the Messiah was distorted as they believed he would be crowned a political king of Israel. The crucifixion was a crisis of faith that led them into a season of disorientation as their expectation, hopes, and dreams for the future were dashed.

In the 40 days after the resurrection and before the ascension, Jesus appears to his disciples in his resurrected body. Jesus wants to lead his followers out of disorientation to a resurrection reorientation, a new life and ministry in which he will not be physically present.

For the disciples, resurrection reorientation meant coming to terms with the reality of the of the resurrection (Luke 24:36-43).

In the passage, Jesus appears and gives a normal Jewish greeting, saying, “Peace be with you.” But it’s more than that.

In the midst of their disorientation, peace is exactly what the disciples need.

They are not only grief-stricken but anxious about an uncertain future. And now they are startled and terrified, thinking they are seeing a ghost or some kind of apparition. The disciples remain silent, but Jesus asks, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?”

Fear and doubt are understandable given what they have gone through, but their fear needs to be transformed so that faith can flourish into the future. For that to happen, the disciples will have to come to terms with the reality of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. So he invites them to look at and touch his hands and feet. A spirit would not be substantial and tangible having “flesh and bones.” In addition, Jesus asks for and eats fish. Only those with physical bodies eat food.

What Jesus wants to make clear to the disciples, and the gospel writers want to make clear to us as readers, is that the risen Lord was no phantom or hallucination. He was real. The Jesus who died was in truth the Christ who rose again. Christianity is not founded on the dreams of people, disordered minds, or the visions of their fevered eyes, but on

the One who faced and fought and conquered death and rose again. Seeing Jesus' risen body was important for the disciples' faith, and the historical account of his resurrection is important for our faith today.

For the disciples, resurrection reorientation meant coming to terms with the reality of the resurrection, but they also had to understand how Jesus' death and resurrection were the fulfillment of Scripture. Jesus reminds them that he predicted everything that had taken place. Like a prophet-teacher, he opened their minds so they could understand all that God had revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. It was always part of God's plan that the Messiah would be crucified and raised again to new life.

All that God has said throughout redemptive history points to Jesus—who he is and what he has done. Jesus' death and resurrection provides a new filter for understanding how he is the completion and fulfillment of Old Testament hope.

Jesus began his ministry proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and now his disciples are to continue that ministry proclaiming good news of the kingdom that will center around Jesus' death and resurrection.

This proclamation will be a call to repentance. Many may be familiar with the Greek translation *metanoia*, which means "change of mind." But since Jesus draws attention to the Old Testament, it's helpful to understand the Hebrew concept of repentance, which refers to "turning."

When the good news of the kingdom is announced, it is an invitation to go in a new direction by turning to God. This involves the awareness that the road we were traveling was the wrong one, and we need to turn to go in a new direction in order to begin a relationship and step into life in the Kingdom of God.

The assurance or gift that comes from this turning from sin to trust Jesus is forgiveness. Sin is no longer a barrier or obstacle between us and God. Resurrection reorientation means we are free to live a new and different life in him.

This good news will go out from Jerusalem to all nations. At first, Jesus' disciples thought this good news was for Jewish people throughout the world. However, they came to understand Jesus is Lord of all, so the message is to go to all nations. The Book of Revelation tells us that there will be people from every tribe, nation, and language standing before the throne of the Lamb, who is Jesus (Revelation 7:9).

For the disciples, resurrection reorientation led to transformed lives. The difference we see in the disciples is remarkable. Their changed lives are one of the greatest evidences for the resurrection. Four words characterize how their lives were changed: witness, wait, worship, work.

Jesus tells the disciples that they are to *witness* to his death and resurrection. A witness is one who tells what they have seen and heard, and we know from Acts that this is what they do. They are changed from cowering, confused disciples to bold, courageous witnesses who are willing to suffer and even die as they faithfully proclaim the good news about Jesus' death and resurrection in word and deed.

We, too, are called to be witnesses, but so many of us don't think we know enough. The root word of *witness* has to do with the heart, sharing our heart, our love for Jesus. Witnessing is not about knowing enough, it's about caring enough and being willing to bear witness to how Jesus has changed our lives. Each one of us can become familiar with a brief explanation of the gospel, write a 100-word testimony, and pray for God to open doors of opportunity for us to witness.

The first disciples were instructed to *wait* for the coming power. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned here, but it was never intended that any of us as Jesus' followers would

witness in our own power. The Spirit empowers us to fulfill our calling and mission.

Luke closes his gospel the same way he began it, with *worship* at the temple in Jerusalem. We are created to glorify, honor, and adore God as the supreme treasure of our life. This is our highest calling and supreme joy. We are made to worship. The only question is whether we worship God or someone or something else.

Finally, Luke, like the other gospel writers, concludes by making clear that the baton has been passed from the risen Jesus to his disciples to continue his *work* in the world. Though Jesus would no longer be physically present, his followers are sent by the authority of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We are his agents, his ambassadors, his hands and feet and mouth-pieces. We are to participate in the ongoing work of Christ in the world until he comes again in glory.

So what? So what does this have to do with our lives right now? I started this sermon with a paradigm for understanding our lives in terms of seasons of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. The disciples experienced a resurrection reorientation that gave direction for their lives and ministry. I think that is something every person needs.

And that's especially true in this season where we find ourselves now.

I have recently heard some people say that the world has not seen the kind of crisis we have experienced due to COVID-19 since WWII. This is a season of disorientation, and we don't know what the long-term effects will be.

In our church, we are facing a pastoral transition, which is no small thing given the longevity of service of our former pastor Pete James.

And as many of you know this year has brought personal challenges and disorientation to me and my family. Others have experienced the same.

I confess sometimes I get a little anxious about all the uncertainty of the future. But mostly, I am confident and encouraged. I've been through enough experiences to know that Jesus is faithful and powerful. So I'm hopeful as I look forward to the resurrection reorientation that Jesus will lead us into as we follow him.

This week at our session meeting I shared some thoughts about this transition period. There is a lot that will change and needs to change, but I started with what won't change. Our passage today actually lays out our VPC core values:

Jesus is Lord, Scripture is our authority, and everyone is called to follow Jesus.

Jesus is the risen Lord, who has conquered sin and death and freed us to live a new and different life in him. We are called to give absolute allegiance to him in every relationship, every circumstance of life.

But if we are honest, we may have idols that are getting in the way. “What is an idol? Anything that is more important than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give you” (Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*).

While there have been many challenges related to COVID, it may be that this season of disorientation has helped us to identify our idols, what we care about more than Jesus. This Easter season may be the time that we, too, need to repent and make a turn in a new direction to experience forgiveness, and to experience a resurrection reorientation. Salvation is not about getting your ticket to heaven but about following Jesus as Lord and making him our first priority above everything else.

The second core value is “Scripture is our authority.” In our information age, we are bombarded by messages from

media. These, along with past experiences, have led to false narratives, which are running and sometimes ruining our lives.

What we need is truth that helps us believe and live as beloved children of God for whom Jesus died and was raised again. Scripture provides the filter, the appropriate worldview, for understanding God, our true identity in Christ, and how to faithfully live life in this world.

We have to know to grow. Knowing God's Word is an important ingredient in growing as we follow Jesus. Maybe the turn you need to make is a turn to prioritize setting aside time to know the word so you can grow in your relationship with Jesus.

Finally, everyone is called to follow Jesus. It's a great temptation to read the accounts of the disciples and put them in the category of super Christians and quickly say, I'm not them. That's true. You are not them, nor am I. We're not called to be them. But every one of us is called to follow Jesus.

To be a disciple literally means to be a follower or apprentice of Jesus. As Dallas Willard says, "Discipleship is learning to live your life as Jesus would live it if he were you." It's a life-long journey, but it's also an intentional one

that involves commitment to the person, body, and work of Christ.

We nurture our commitment to the person of Christ, our risen Lord, as we spend time with him, worshipping, praying, and studying Scripture.

Our commitment to the risen Lord is also a commitment to the Body of Christ, his church, as we grow and serve together with others who share our faith and values.

And as we already saw in the passage, following our risen Lord involves a commitment to participate in Jesus' ongoing work in the world. By the power of the Spirit, we witness to the difference he has made in our lives, and we love and serve people through our words and deeds.

I'm excited and hopeful about what is ahead as we follow our Lord into a resurrection reorientation. Jesus' first disciples turned their world upside down as God used them to share the gospel through new means of communication and travel. Our current circumstances provide so many opportunities for a similar explosive expansion of the gospel. I look forward to how God will use us individually and together as a church as He leads us into a resurrection reorientation.