



LIFEGROUP

RESOURCE GUIDE

for the week of April 23

“Surely, I am with you always...” (Matthew 28.20)

“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” (Hebrews 13.5).

Easter is living proof of these promises! Easter means that we can be sure that Jesus is with those who are devoting their lives to follow Him. He promises to stay with those who believe in Him— despite our failings, frailties, and duplicities. There is nothing you or I can do to scare Him away or to cause Him to abandon us. His presence brings a new kind of joy and a new attitude to worldly ambitions and pleasures. He brings a new peace and strength to our heart and conscience, a new reality in prayer, a fresh understanding of the Bible, and a new power during times of trial or temptation.

The resurrection will not mitigate the need for spiritual growth nor does God promise to dispel all calamity or disappointment. There may even be times when, temporarily, this new joy, peace, and love appear lost. But just as natural fruit grows and develops so spiritual fruit will grow in a person’s life where Jesus is truly present. There will be tangible results from acting on Jesus’ promise. Circumstances will never be able to judge God but God will judge our circumstances and His promises will be authenticated in our experience.

John Newton, who composed Amazing Grace as a result of the love of God which could forgive a slave trader like him, summed up the personal promises of the resurrection when he observed, “I’m not what I ought to be, I’m not what I would like to be, I’m not what I hope to be, but I’m not what I was, and by the grace of God I am what I am.”

Are you quite sure that Jesus is with you? When I ask some Christians this question I often hear, “Well, I think so,” or “I hope so.” This is unfortunate. Jesus promises to come into our lives and never, never leave us or forsake us. So if we say, “I think so” or “I hope so” we are insulting His faithfulness and mistrusting His word.

During a rugby match at university, a friend of mine was particularly unnerved to see a group of humongous muscle bound men bearing down on him. As he anticipated the apocalypse that awaited him, a voice to his left said, “With you,” and with intense relief he passed the ball! The risen Christ comes to the sad, the depressed, the frightened, the disappointed, the weary, and the confused and says, “With you.” We can be wonderfully sure that Jesus is with us.

This second week after Easter let us pray with renewed faith and confidence, “Jesus, please help me to live my life trusting and knowing that you are with me all the time.”

Enjoy your LifeGroup!

Getting to know one another better...

Which do you like to celebrate more: Christmas or Easter? Why?

Luke 24.13-35: Didn't our hearts burn?

And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. 16 But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. 17 And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" 19 And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, 20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. 21 "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. 22 "But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. 24 "Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see." 25 And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Luke 24.28 And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. 29 But they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So He went in to stay with them. 30 When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" 33 And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, 34 saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.

The movements in this passage are remarkable. Jesus comes among us in surprise, and we journey from fear to trust, from doubt to joy, from disbelief to power, from grief to witness.

Cleopas and his friend return home to Emmaus, stunned and saddened by the death of Jesus and the death of their hope that he was not only a prophet but also the long-awaited one who would redeem Israel. Added to their grief was their confusion, based on eyewitness accounts of the women in their group who made the amazing statement that Jesus had been raised. While trying to assimilate this news that perhaps they received with some skepticism, based on the earlier response of the disciples to the women's testimony that it "seemed to them an idle tale" (24:11), they are confronted with Jesus' declaration of their foolishness and their unwillingness to risk embracing all that the prophets have declared to them.

Because of his confrontation of them, their hunger for more knowledge leads them to a mysterious encounter. Not only does Jesus break open the Scriptures for them; he breaks the bread and breaks open their hearts. It is a pattern-setting moment as they make the journey that all disciples are called to travel,

from knowledge to encounter, from information to transformation. This movement from head to heart continues to their feet as their encounter with Jesus results in their returning the seven miles to Jerusalem and proclaiming with enthusiasm, perhaps echoing the words of the eleven:

“The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” (v. 34). In that moment the women’s encounter is validated, and experience of the living Christ becomes the primary foundation of witness. Even more, experience of the living Christ takes on the characteristic of a move from fear to joy.

Reflecting together on Luke 24.13-35

What kind of people do you think these two disciples appear to be?

What strikes you about the “Stranger’s” dialog with them?

What does the Resurrection prove? Why? Are there Scriptures that come to mind that support your answer?

What difference does Jesus’ resurrection make to your life and the way you respond to your circumstances? Can you think of an example?

Have you ever had a correcting insight about Jesus like these two disciples on the road to Emmaus?

In his rebuke Jesus identifies the cause of their despair: reluctance to believe the Scriptures about the Messiah (Luke 24:25). Can you think of a time when the Scriptures moved you from despair to new hope?

Most Christians today are reluctant to include the Bible in their personal testimony about Jesus. Why do you think this is? And is this good, bad, or indifferent? Explain...

How significant are the Cross and Resurrection when you share your faith?

My prayer requests (write in advance what you want your group to pray for...)

Praying for my group...