

3rd Sunday in Easter – Year B – Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY
Based on Luke 24:36-49 written by Pastor Paul Horn

Jesus' resurrection scatters all your doubts

On Saturday, May 20, Otter Creek Park will be hosting "Run the Gauntlet," a 6.5 mile race with mud pits, cargo nets, tight ropes, a trek through the creek, a total of 20 obstacles. Runners must sign a waiver of liability and assumption of risk and indemnity agreement to participate in the race. Individuals can enter on their own or teams of 4-6 runners can sign up. So, who wants to get a Faith Lutheran Church team to "Run the Gauntlet"? Some of you are thinking, "No way! There's no way I would ever finish that kind of race. My body hurts just thinking about it!" The Soldiers are all raising their hands. They went through tougher things in basic! On the other hand, they go through this kind of thing on a regular basis and they're thinking, "No thanks!" Some of you are confident you would finish and maybe even be a contender. Where do people get their confidence facing and overcome these kinds of obstacles?

Life is like running the gauntlet. It takes a toll on our bodies and our hearts and emotions. God promises us in his Word that he will always be with us and strengthen us to trudge through whatever muddy obstacles life throws at us. But because life is the way it is we have a tendency to doubt God's promises. This morning we learn from Luke chapter 24 that Jesus' resurrection scatters all your doubts.

It's Easter Sunday, three days after Jesus had been brutally crucified and buried. It was now evening, and the disciples are gathered in a house, with the doors locked – Scripture tells us, "Because they were afraid of the Jews." If their religious leaders put Jesus to death, what could they do to us? Jesus was gone, and in spite of the eye-witness news reports from their companions that day, their confidence had disappeared. Doubt and fear were rooted in their hearts.

But lo and behold! Jesus appears! He stands in the middle of the room, even though the doors were locked! In his glorified resurrected body, he can do anything he wants, even defy the laws of physics. The disciples' reaction is, well, maybe what we would have done. They were afraid and startled. They thought he was a ghost. It was a common superstition in those days, when a person died their ghost lived on earth for a while. Remember their earlier reaction when they saw Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee. Normal human beings don't do this kind of stuff.

Jesus calms their fears and gives them proof to scatter their doubt, "**Touch me and see.**" The one who had been crucified still bore on his resurrected body the scars inflicted on the cross. You can't touch a ghost. Ghosts don't have flesh and blood. They still didn't believe. "**Do you have anything to eat?**" he asked them. There in their presence he ate some fish. Ghost can't eat food. They still didn't believe. "**This is what I told you while I was with you,**" he said, "**[the Scriptures] must be fulfilled.**" Yes, they needed to see him in the flesh, but the Scriptures had the power to open their minds to understand why he had to suffer and die and why he rose again. This is exactly what Jesus did with the two disciples from Emmaus earlier that evening. As they were walking along the road he appeared and walked with them, but they didn't know it was him. He explained why the Christ had to suffer and die. They reached the disciples' home, Jesus stayed for dinner, and after he had broken the bread and given thanks their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus! He immediately disappeared. They looked at each other in amazement and said, "**Were not our hearts burning within us as he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?**" This is what possessed the power to scatter their doubt: the power of the Scriptures - the power of God's promises. The promise of Jesus' resurrection and the fulfillment of Jesus' resurrection scatters all doubt.

Why didn't the disciples believe? When we look at ourselves we can understand this. What's on your mind today? What makes you anxious and worried? If you're sitting there in pain, then your health is making you anxious. Especially if it's a "thorn in the flesh" that doesn't seem to want to remove itself from your body. If you're a Soldier, especially one who has recently returned from deployment, your spouse may be worried for you, wondering what's going on in your heart and mind, why you are different from when you left twelve months ago, anxious to just listen to you and to pray with you. If you're an adult who is back in school you may be anxious about your ability to perform in the classroom, after all, it's been a while! If you're in a home where the relationship between husband and wife, mom and dad, parent and child is not so peaceful, your heart may be troubled today. What is it that troubles you today?

You know, God commands you and me, "**Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed for I am your God.**" (Isaiah 41:10) So why is it that we doubt when God commands us not to?

Is it because we don't see improvement in our lives when we pray to God, or we experience the exact opposite of what he promised? In our country we can write letters or emails to our senators and congressman when we're unhappy – when they haven't done what they promised. When there is no improvement, we head to the polls and vote in a new one. It happens every year – it's why many people are skeptical of their politicians. We can't vote out our God, although at times we feel like we'd like to. We become skeptical of God because he is slow in acting. Yet God commands us, "Trust in my promises." Well, what if I doubt because I don't know his promises well enough? Then shame on me for not knowing his Word! That may be part of my problem!

But the bottom line is this: like the disciples our sinful hearts are naturally slow to believe. Think about it. They sat at his feet and learned for three years, he had their undivided attention. Yet they still did not believe at first. That's the sinful mind. We are naturally inclined to doubt God rather than be confident in God.

Jesus says to you and me, "How foolish you are and how slow to believe! Why are you troubled? Why do doubts rise in your hearts? I told you these things would happen."

Has not God told us everything we should expect in this life? Hardships, sickness and health, riches or poverty, strife among family members and in marriage, war, natural disasters, persecution of our faith, and finally death - all because of sin? These things should not surprise us. Has not God also told us everything we should expect from him in this life - all that he promises to do for us in spite of sin? We will trust his promises because he kept this one big promise: "I will go to Jerusalem, I will suffer and be crucified and on the third I will rise again!" Jesus' bodily resurrection scatters our doubt. His resurrection proves Jesus keeps his Word.

The disciples understood once Jesus pointed them back to God's promises. Isaiah was so clear, writing 700 years before it happened, "**He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.**" Of course! The lamb – the animal sacrificed on the altar at the temple, whose blood was spilt – he is the Lamb, whose blood was shed – here is the body that once carried our sins and iniquities. Lord, forgive me for my unbelief! My friends, God has taken away your sins of doubt. The proof is the Lamb of God. The proof is your Baptism where you were covered in the Lamb's blood. The proof is the Lord's Supper where Jesus promises you again and again, "This is for the forgiveness of your sins!" Yes! Our doubt has to run away and hide, when God showers us with his promises of love and forgiveness!

Not only with his death but also with his resurrection Jesus proved to his disciples from the Scriptures that he would rise. King David saw Jesus' resurrection 1000 years before it happened when he said, "**You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.**" (Ps 16:10) The disciples were kicking

themselves, "Of course! Why didn't we see it before?" Jesus promised, **"I am the resurrection and the life."** And he proved it on Easter Sunday morning! Jesus' resurrection scatters all your doubts and gives you confidence. It's the confidence of Job who proclaimed, **"I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth, and after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God, I myself will see him with my own eyes, I and not another, how my heart yearns within me!"** (Job 19:25-27) Yes, my doubts about death and the life to come flee, for I know without a doubt that my Savior lives, and because he lives, I will live, too.

Christ's resurrection scatters our doubts, because Christ's resurrection increases our trust in his promises. God kept this promise. He will keep all of his promises to me. He gives me confidence when I have to face life and when I face death.

What's that like, living with complete trust in God? We saw it in our First Lesson. The Apostle Peter was in prison, shackled hand and foot, between two soldiers, waiting to be put on trial and executed the next day. What is Peter doing? Sleeping! so soundly that the angel who appeared to him has to slap on the side to wake him up. That is the peace in God he had... the confidence he had because of Christ's resurrection.

This week a man looked me in the eyes as he lay in the hospital and said, "Pastor, I'm not afraid of dying. I'm ready to see God." That's the confidence we have because of Christ's resurrection. That same day I was the NICU baptizing a baby born six weeks too early, while the Kosair Hospital baby team was waiting to transport him to Louisville. Confidence is telling the parents, after seeing their infant child rolled away by complete strangers, that this is God's promise to them, that through baptism, their child is now a child of God, his sins are washed away, heaven is his... because of Christ's resurrection.

Confidence is saying with the Psalm writers, **"God will redeem my life from the grave, he will surely take me to himself,"** (Ps 49) **"The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid,"** (Ps 118:6)... because of Christ's resurrection. Confidence is saying with the Apostle Paul, **"We do not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead,"** (2Cor 1:9)... because of Christ's resurrection. Confidence is saying, **"Yet I am always with you, you hold me by my right hand... you will take me into glory... my flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever,"** (Ps 73) because of Christ's resurrection.

A man was walking his daughter down to the bus stop, and as they were walking a stray dog began chasing them. The child became frantic and started crying, but daddy whipped around, raised his arms high in the air, and "Roar!" The dog stopped and ran away. The child immediately stopped whimpering and again put her little hand in daddy's strong hand. What are you anxious about? What worries you? What doubts do you have? Tell them to go away! You will put your trust in God, you will walk this life with your hand in his promises, and you will believe and not doubt, for Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen!