

Discipleship Moment

Text: Luke 24:36-44

Over the last three weeks we have explored the evidence of our faith. But Pastor Ben and I have been intentional about how we approach this topic. The evidence we have isn't based on observable, scientific evidence, but the evidence of eye witness testimony. A group of people experienced Jesus, which brings us to a recurring theme: our faith is built on a person—Jesus.

This seems fishy to us: we live in a world with cameras on our phones and are able to record anything that goes on around us. We live in a world where people misremember what happens and people lie about what they have seen—either for personal gain or for attention.

That is the way it is now, in the 21st century. But the Scriptures were written in an ancient world. Before there was Facebook, internet, and cable news to rot people's brains. Most individuals didn't read, so all they had was what they saw and the stories they told. The normal Jewish person would have large sections of the Hebrew Bible (especially the first five books) memorized. They would have told the stories and sang the psalms to one another for religious, family, and entertainment reasons. In fact, much of the Old Testament, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is written in a repetitive and circular manner for the very reason that it is easier to memorize and repeat.

On Sunday we heard, briefly, that the Apostles had authority to preach and proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus because of they were eye-witnesses to Jesus. In Acts chapter 1, the Apostles (there was only 11 after Judas killed himself) decide to add one more so they can have 12 Apostles (the number of Jewish tribes). The requirements to be an Apostle are this: "...one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection."

The qualifications for being an Apostle are that the person had to have been an eyewitness to the baptism and ministry of Jesus and be and eyewitness to his resurrection and ascension. This person had to have been with Jesus and the others "since the beginning" of Jesus' ministry and been with Jesus after his resurrection and ascension.

Being an eyewitness was *the* qualification to be an Apostle. The first Christians demanded that the stories and preaching of their leaders was from eyewitnesses. This makes sense, then, that the Gospel writers are so specific about some of the names of the people who were with Jesus. When Mark writes in chapter 15, "There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome." Mark says there were a group of women watching the crucifixion of Jesus, and then names three specifically. Why would he do this? In the ancient world, a woman's testimony didn't count for much, if the Gospel writer was writing 100 years after the crucifixion, why include the names of some of women when no one would respect their testimony? It doesn't make sense.

Unless these women were still alive when the Gospel writer wrote the gospel. And, by including their names, the writer is inviting the reader of the Gospel to ask the women mentioned about the crucifixion. This is what is imbedded in all the Gospels, names of people, people who were known by the original readers of the Gospels, and, by listing the names of the people specifically, the readers could go, find the people themselves, and ask about what they saw.

In the ancient world, eyewitness testimony was the only way you could get the real story. People remembered what they saw, and they practiced telling it so it could be told and retold in an accurate fashion. That's why we have four Gospels—four different eyewitness testimonies—then written down toward the end of the lives of the eyewitnesses in order to accurately communicate what Jesus did, said, and who he was.

There is really nothing scandalous about the writing of the Gospels (or the rest of the books of the Bible, by the way). We are pretty much told in the text who the eyewitnesses are whose stories and testimonies are recorded. The Gospels are not a game of telephone: passed down from one person to the next over generations. The Gospels are the eyewitness testimony of those who knew Jesus best, and then written down by their disciples (during their lifetime) to accurately communicate who this Jesus is.

Praise be to God, who, through the faithful testimony of these eyewitnesses, is still transforming lives through the power of the Gospel.

Going Deeper

Use this resource to start conversations about this week's sermon for your personal devotions, with your family, or with your Life Group. You can use one question per day or all at once

1. The game of "telephone" is where you whisper one thing to someone, and they whisper what they heard to someone else, and you go down the line until the end. And the last person (most likely) heard something completely different than what the first person whispered. Have you ever played the game "telephone?" Why do you think that it is so easy to mishear what someone says?
2. Why do you think being an eyewitness was so important to the Apostles?
3. Read John 20. Underline every time someone is named. How many names are there, who is named?
4. Read Mark 16. Underline every time someone is named. How many names are there, who is named.
5. If everyone of these named individuals in the Gospel is a reliable eyewitness, how does this change how we read the Gospels? How does it change how we follow Jesus?
6. Have you witnessed Jesus? Has he transformed your life? How? Have you shared this with others? Why or why not?