

THE LORD APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES

Lesson: John 20:19-23 and Luke 24:31

The first lesson from the WORD, John 20:19-23, told about the LORD'S appearing to the disciples in the evening of the day He rose again from the sepulcher. This took place on a Sunday, which we now celebrate as Easter Sunday.

Only a week before, on what we now call Palm Sunday, He had made a triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem. On that day, He rode upon a donkey, as only kings or priests were allowed to do in those days. He was escorted by His disciples and friends; and crowds of people surrounded Him with palm leaves in their hands, crying "Hosanna, blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the LORD". All these people expected the LORD to make Himself King, and to drive out their enemies; and they rejoiced because of this.

But, as you know, there were many leaders of the people, and many rich and powerful men, who did not want this to happen at all. They feared that if the LORD were made king, they would lose their power and their riches. And so, they plotted together to see how they could prevent the LORD from being so popular with the people; and they decided the only way to do so was to put Him to death. So secretly, one night, they took Him captive, and unjustly tried Him for blasphemy on the testimony of false witnesses. On this account, they stirred up the people against Him, and then, by threatening uprisings and riots, they forced Pilate, the Roman governor, to order that the LORD be crucified. This took place on a day which we now celebrate as Good Friday.

When the LORD died, or so it seemed, He was reverently taken down from the cross, and His body placed in a sepulcher. And, as you know, a great stone was placed at the entrance of the sepulcher to block it. Now, the next day was Saturday, the Sabbath, on which day it was not lawful for the Jews to go about their regular business, but they were required to stay at home to celebrate the Sabbath. So, it wasn't until the following day, on Sunday, the first day of the week, very early in the morning, that the women were able to come to the sepulcher, to find the great stone rolled away, and to learn from the angels there that the LORD was not there, but had risen as He said. The women, and the disciples, too, could hardly believe this—they were so sure the LORD had died. Indeed, it was not until the LORD had appeared unto them several times that they really began to believe that it was the LORD indeed Who had risen.

The LORD appeared first to Mary Magdalene in the garden beside the sepulcher, on the morning of the day He had risen; and, later, soon afterwards, He appeared unto the women who were on the way to tell the disciples. Then the LORD appeared to two disciples on their way to the village of Emmaus. At first they did not recognize Him; but after He had shown them how the things said in Moses and in all the prophets concerned Him, and after He had sat down to a meal with them in Emmaus, and He had taken bread, and broken it, and blessed it, then, it is said, "Their eyes were opened and they knew Him." Full of joy they returned to Jerusalem to tell the others. And there they found that the LORD had also appeared to Peter.

We read in our first lesson about the fifth time the LORD appeared after His resurrection. This was in the evening of the day He had risen. All the disciples, except Judas Iscariot, who was dead, and Thomas Didymus, who was absent for some reason we don't know of, were gathered together in a house. Since the LORD's enemies had accused the disciples of stealing the LORD's body from the sepulcher, the disciples were very fearful of what these wicked people might do to them; and so they shut the door of the house tight, and, no doubt, talked together about what might happen to them. But they also talked together about the wonderful things that had happened on that day: the news that the angel had given to the women that the LORD was risen again, and about what the people who had seen Him had said. It was while they were thus gathered together that the LORD suddenly appeared among them, and He said unto them, "Peace be unto you"; and then He showed them His hands and His side where were the wounds He had suffered when He was crucified, so they might know for sure that it was the LORD Himself, and not someone else. And the disciples were exceedingly glad.

But, Thomas, who hadn't been there, wouldn't even believe all the rest of the disciples. He was like a person who wanted so much to believe, but didn't dare let himself lest somehow he find himself mistaken, and suffer the hurt of disappointment. And so Thomas said he could not believe until he had seen the LORD for himself and touched Him.

And, as we read in our lesson, exactly a week later, again on a Sunday when all the disciples, including Thomas, were gathered together in a house, with the door tight shut, again the LORD suddenly appeared unto them and said, "Peace be unto you." And, so at last, Thomas let himself believe, and so he said to the LORD, "Oh, my LORD, and my GOD."

There are two things you should notice particularly about the LORD's appearing to the disciples in this wonderful way. The first thing to notice particularly is that the LORD appeared to the disciples when they were thinking of Him *with love*—they were thinking of the things He had said, and of what the angels had told the women; they were thinking of what they had been told by those who said they had seen Him—the women, the two at Emmaus, and Peter. They were

wondering what all these things meant, and trying to understand them. They hoped very much that the LORD had risen, and that they would see Him again, and find out from Him what this all meant. Their hearts, and their minds, were turned towards the LORD; and the LORD appeared to them.

The second thing to notice especially is that when the disciples saw the LORD, He seemed to be exactly the same as they had last seen Him, even to the wounds He had suffered when He was crucified, It seemed to them that He had the same body as before. But this was not so. The LORD no longer had a natural body like yours and mine, which He had had when He was born into the world, and when He talked and walked with the disciples; this body He had put off and glorified, so that when He rose from the sepulcher, He appeared In His Divine Human. That Divine Human appeared exactly the same as the body He had had, because it was the LORD Himself the disciples saw; but they did not see Him with their natural eyes. As we are told in the second lesson Luke 24:31, after He had risen, the LORD could be seen only with the eyes of the spirit. And though the disciples didn't realize it, because they were thinking of the LORD with love and hope, their spiritual eyes were opened, and so they could see Him in His Divine Human. That this is so, we can see from the story: for they were in a room with the door tightly shut, and suddenly the LORD appeared in the midst of them. He didn't go through the door, or come into the room, He was there in the midst of them.

These two things are important for us to notice, because it is the same today with us as it was with the disciples. If we think of the LORD with love, if we try to understand the meaning of His Word, and of the teaching of the Word that He is risen in His Divine Human, if we really want to see Him in His Divine Human, the eyes of our spirit will be opened, and we will see Him. We will see that He is with us; and He will give us His blessing. *Amen.*