

Every Sinner Matters or No One Matters
Ascension – May 18, 2023
Acts 1:1-11

There are synoptic gospels and there are non-synoptic gospels. Synoptic meaning the eyewitness account by an individual, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote down what they witnessed.

Matthew and Mark are synoptics in the traditional sense. Luke on the other hand, who also wrote the Acts of the Apostles, is a synoptic as well, but not in the traditional sense.

Luke did not necessarily witness everything for himself which happened in his account.

BUT!!! He did investigate the ones who did, so, not only do we get his eyewitness, but we get the eyewitness of Mary, telling him what she said in *her Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55). The eyewitness of Zechariah, who detailed *his prophecy* concerning Jesus to Luke (Luke 1:67-79). Simeon, who told him *the hymn he sang* when he saw Jesus for the first time (Luke 2:29-32) that we still sing to this day as the *Nunc Dimittis* “*The Song of Simeon*” when we depart ourselves after communing with and being in the presence of the very body and blood of Christ.

Not just an eyewitness account but the account of *many eyewitnesses*.
(Luke 1:1-4)

So, Luke continues his inspiration from the Holy Spirit to show us what happens Forty Days after Jesus is risen from the dead. And like a 1st century gumshoe detective (*Start to put on the trench coat and don the fedora picking up the magnifying glass!*)

he lays out a case for the end of Jesus’ days in the flesh on earth, and details what we should do with the clues that help us solve the crime of sin in this world!

First, we must tell the world what they are and what they are in danger of losing, should they ignore our message of hope.

For the disciples were once without hope and without a savior from their sin. So, we were once by nature sinful and unclean with nary a chance of salvation as well.

Likewise, the world without Christ, lacks any expectation of redemption.

But the disciples were chosen to be Christians. They were given the truth of life found in Christ alone, who they believed in as the Messiah and witnessed, firsthand, His death and resurrection that saved them from their sins.

But they weren’t done there.

Having gone from being pagans to Christians, now they would be sent forth as apostles to tell the world what they knew, so they would hear the gospel of Jesus too and receive the redemption of their souls, and as new missionaries; be sent too!

It's funny today that many people have assumed our identity by calling themselves disciples of various things.

Some are disciples of charismatic figures who started their own religion or philosophical way of life; that called for communal living and giving up the traditional trappings of the commercial world.

Some are sold out disciples for the company they work for; convinced giving their all; heart, soul, and mind will be the formula for *their* satisfying career goals.

Some are disciples of their bodies, nutritional eating, body shaping, and Zen like meditation. Peak fitness brings them to the pinnacle of their health goals to be shared, promoted, win body building contests, and be, sought after, nutritional experts to everyone.

Some are disciples of cryptozoology; Big Foot sighting, UFOs, Skinwalkers and Werewolves.

If you don't know what any of these are, basically, they are unverifiable mythical creatures and objects that are routinely reported as naturally occurring phenomena even though there is no widespread peer reviewed verified scientific data concerning any of it.

But, what if it was?

What if there are real aliens flying around in their UFOs, what if Bigfoot is just the holdover of Gigantopithecus whom we thought went extinct right after Noah's time.

What if there are giant man wolves that can be taken down by the purity of a silver bullet?

Well, even if there are, it's not like they are *God incarnate in man*. It's not like they are the fulfillment of the prophecy of the salvation of the world. It's not even like any of them could do anything that would redeem the sinner and save their soul from Hell!

At the end of the day, they would just be a coelacanth, a dodo bird, the Tasmanian devil recreated from extinction, or an aberrant asteroid hitting the earth with enough metal to make a decent *Bowie Knife*.

But that Knife is not the Sword of Truth that cuts some in and cuts some out. Recreations are not resurrections that give us hope for the world that we one day we will be resurrected too.

After all the investigation is done and the data is collected and the report is made, the crime of sin remains unsolved, where cryptozoology is concerned.

Here in our gospel, we have a completely different conclusion and a true remedy for the iniquity we all struggle with.

Jesus Ascends so the paraclete can, and will, guide our efforts and order our days.

Today's account has Luke laying out the facts and figures out just what the Holy Spirit is sent for.

And He guides us, as the ultimate counselor I talked about last week, soon to manifest himself in a powerfully undeniable way at the Feast of Pentecost. But that is a sermon for another day.

Today, we will look at the murder book if you will. And solve the crime of sin.

I don't know how many of you like police procedurals, I find them fascinating.

My favorite is the Harry Bosch series. Recently there was a TV show version that came out, and it was pretty good, but the Bosch character in writing simply can't be outdone.

His character is flawed and real. Just like all of us. But his gift is caring about the least in the city of Los Angeles, that most in the department don't consider worthy of wasting the meager resources of the police.

While I understand why many will go unnoticed; after all they are homeless, streetwalkers, illegal immigrants that have died in mysterious circumstances; nobody will miss them. Harry has a mindset that I think is motivated by Christ himself, even though I am fairly certain the creator of the character, Michael Connelly, probably didn't consider that at all.

And that mindset is simply put by Det. Harry Bosch, "Everyone matters, or no one matters". So as Harry picks up the case, or the cold case as he did in later novels, he starts with the mentality of *everyone matters*, but what matters the most in the investigation is the clues documented in the murder book.

And like a team of exegetes carefully translating the word of God from the Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic; Harry pours over *his text*, the *murder book*, and searches for what he may have missed that helps him solve the crime.

I love the moment when Michael Connelly slowly lets out little details, we saw before, but now systemically puts them together like a puzzle to reveal the likely motive, means and opportunity of the murderer, and then shores up the evidence necessary to bring it to the District Attorney to prosecute the criminal and achieve justice.

Today's lesson is mysterious indeed, but it does leave us with some clues about everyone involved and affirm the miracle that gives us confidence looking forward to Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit explodes onto the scene to spiritually and literally anoint the disciples who become apostles with the message of redemption to the world.

First, we have this curious figure of Theophilus, who is greeted in the beginning of Luke, Luke's first book and Acts being his second.

Is it an actual man, or should we read the Greek text strait, and call it what it is, *Theophilus*, simply meaning to the *one who loves God!*

We also know that these are the ones who were taught by Jesus himself, saw His miracles, and now witness Him physically risen from the dead. After 40 days of personal instruction, they are now educated in how the church will be set up and they start doing it exactly like we do today shortly after Jesus ascends, as we learn from chapter 2:42 of the Acts of the Apostles.

So, the those who love God, have been personally taught by God in the flesh and are particularly chosen by God Himself to start God's church for everyone.

And boy did God mean everyone.

Almost immediately, gentiles are given the Spirit of God (10:44-48) Women are featured as necessary for building the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth (16:11-15). Even the dead are raised for the sake of comforting the people and revealing God in their midst (20:7-12)
Truly everyone mattered to the early church!

And if everyone matters, that means everyone needed the message of hope that is found in the cross, not as an implementation of death, but as a symbol of life for those who believe Jesus died there for sinners who need saving and rose from the dead to prove His divinity and majesty over our former slave master the devil.

The Ascension Commission is still our mission to this day.

We, see the eyewitness account of Jesus Ascending to the right hand of the Father knowing He has sent His Holy Spirit to guide us and help us in that mission.

We know that if the Father is everywhere, Jesus at the right hand of the Father is everywhere too. So, we know the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit never leave us or forsake us. He didn't go away from us; He goes where we need Him for us.

Jesus knows, the Holy Spirit helps us in that knowledge that in the Father's creation, every *sinner* matters, or no one matters.

AMEN

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