

**“SCARY RELIGION”
Pastor Mike Corwin****TEXT:** LUKE 24:35-43**GOD’S WORD:** HEBREWS 12:18-24**I – O.S.R. HAUNTED HOUSE:**

I have been seeing and hearing all the ads for the various haunted houses that seem to ooze out of the darkness at this time of the year. One of the ones that everyone talks about from this area is the yearly haunted house they have at the old Mansfield Reformatory.

I became familiar with this one a few years ago when I was working with a mission outreach program called Southside Productions that the Methodist Church had in operation. It worked with making connections with the inner city kids in Mansfield and connecting them to the Gospel. One Friday night we took a group of the kids to the Haunted House at the prison. When we got there some of the kids decided not to go in and I volunteered to stay outside with them. I explained to the other adults that after 29 years of police work my idea of a fun time was not walking through a dark prison while people dressed up as axe murderers were jumping out at me! So I stayed outside with the younger kids while Pastor Jeff Croft took a group of the older kids through.

As we stood there in a group, the rest of our kids came running out the door, obviously scared. Jeff came out and explained that the older kids weren’t as brave as they thought they were, and he told me what had happened. About half way through the prison the kids became obviously scared and were gathered around and holding on to him. To bolster their courage they started singing the familiar hymn, “Jesus loves the little children.” They were walking through this long dark hallway and sang the first line, “Jesus loves the little children “when the empty wall itself, in a low deep voice sang, “All the little children of the world.” It was at that point the kids became unnerved and bolted for the exit! I stood there with all those kids standing around me and shaking, some crying, as Pastor Jeff came out the door laughing.

II – SCARY RELIGION:

This well-known Christian Hymn, one we had taught the kids in the program because it spoke about the inclusiveness of Jesus, should have been a thing of comfort. But instead it was used against them by someone inside the haunted house. This well-known hymn of Christian virtue became the very thing that scared them out of their wits. This got me to thinking about the fact that sometimes religion is a scary thing.

Stop for a moment and put yourself in the spot of being a new church person. Someone who wandered in off the street and has no idea what this thing called Christianity is all about. Or a young child who is just starting to listen to what’s going on in church or Sunday school. They start hearing stories about two naked people named Adam and Eve in a garden with a talking snake. They hear about frogs and

locust descending on a place called Egypt, or a whole river turning to blood so Moses could lead God's people to freedom. They hear about a God who didn't like the way people were behaving so he flooded them out in the days of Noah. Or a God who got angry about sin so he destroyed two whole cities (Sodom & Gomorrah) with fire and burning rocks. They hear about a man named Jonah getting swallowed whole by a monster fish. They hear someone talking about people coming back to life and walking out of a tomb still wrapped up like a mummy like Lazarus did. There's the story that starts our Christmas season about a teenage girl getting pregnant by a Spirit as angels go around talking to everybody. They hear about how even God's own Son was treated poorly and nailed to a cross. They might even get the idea they've fallen into the midst of cannibals as we speak about eating the body and drinking the blood of that Son.

When I then think of how religion was used to fuel historical events like the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Salem witch hunts, the KKK, and slavery, it's easy to see how religion can be scary isn't it?

III – TEXT:

Even Jesus' disciples got scared from time to time didn't they? How scared were they when they thought their boat was sinking and Jesus was asleep in the stern? How scared were they during another storm when they saw Jesus walking towards them on top of the water? Didn't they think they were seeing a ghost? They didn't always see the big picture, they didn't always grasp what was going on. They were human too, just like you and me.

The text I want to look at this morning is one in which we find the disciples in one of those moments of being scared, and how Jesus removed their fear.

Luke 24:35-43 (NLT)

³⁵ Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread. ³⁶ And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. "Peace be with you," he said. ³⁷ But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost! ³⁸ "Why are you frightened?" he asked. "Why are your hearts filled with doubt? ³⁹ Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do." ⁴⁰ As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he ate it as they watched.

On the day of his resurrection Jesus had appeared to two of his followers who had left the city of Jerusalem and were on the road to Emmaus. He revealed himself to them as he broke bread for supper. They then rushed back to Jerusalem and met with the 11 remaining disciples and other followers of Jesus and told them what had happened. You can imagine all the emotions going through their minds and bodies. Their leader, their rabbi, the man whom they had loved and followed had been arrested,

tried, beaten, crucified, and buried. They themselves now thought they were being hunted by the religious leaders who wanted all the loose ends of this whole Jesus mess tied up. They then found out the body of Jesus was gone and now these two men were telling them they had seen the body up and moving around. This is hard for them to grasp. Evidently from reading this passage they had their doubts about this whole resurrection thing.

Then Jesus is standing in the middle of them. POOF! One minute he's not there, the next he is, and he didn't just meander in and sit down, he suddenly appeared. I can well understand why they were all scared, why they were frightened. They thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus gave them the standard Jewish greeting of "Peace be with you" but it didn't settle them down. So he presented it in a way they would finally understand.

He put it on their level. He told them to settle down and he held out his hands and his feet. He allowed them to see the wounds so they know it was him and that he had been crucified just as they saw or heard had happened. He then had them touch him to make sure he was real and that their hands didn't pass through. He wasn't a ghost, he was solid and had flesh and bone just like them. Finally he ate. Ghosts don't eat do they? Only real live human beings eat.

Jesus calmed them by taking the abstract and making it real. By taking the message of Salvation and presenting it to them in a form they could understand. He took the idea of forgiveness through his Sacrifice and resurrection and proved it to them. His actions fulfilled his message. He took the dead and made it alive and when he did all that they were no longer scared.

IV – PRESENTATION:

Religion is not supposed to be a scary thing. The Bible was not written to scare us to death. It was written to lead us to life. Jesus did not come to condemn us. He came to save us. This is the message we should be giving to the world. In order to do that we need to look at this passage and learn two things from it. The first is PRESENTATION. To take the fright out of Christianity we have to consider how we present it.

We can take the Bible and present an image of a vengeful God who is sitting around just waiting for someone to make a mistake so he can smite them and wipe them off the face of the earth, or we can show a God who watched his creation self-destruct and stepped in to save it. We can present a God who supports slavery and the second rate treatment of women and other groups, or we can show the world a God who loves everyone and sees them all as equal. We can project a God who has unattainable standards that no one has ever lived up to, or a forgiving God who takes our human frailty into account

and loves us anyhow. We can focus on a God who calls us to be perfect, or the God who made us perfect through the sacrifice of his own Son on the cross.

What I see in today's passage, as well as this book (the Bible) is the fact we are the Church of Jesus Christ, and we are called to present him to the world. We remove the frightening aspects of life in today's society by presenting them with their Savior. We help them through the trials and tribulations of the things they face by putting them face to face with Jesus. We make it our business to do what Jesus did with those first disciples on that day of resurrection – make him real to those who need him. Present him in such a way they know he was wounded for our sins, that he died for us, that he was resurrected and because of that we can have eternal life. We have to present Jesus in such a way he appears in the midst of their broken and chaotic life and they come to find him real.

V – PERSONAL:

The second thing we have to do according to this passage is we have to make it PERSONAL. You can't remove the fears of others until you've removed your own. The disciples who experienced Jesus that day in Jerusalem would not have been able to form and expand the church of Jesus if they were still shaking in a corner because they had seen a ghost. They went out and spread the Gospel to others because they found Jesus to be real in their own lives. They reached out and touched him and came to the conclusion the hymn is right...he lives and because he lives all fear is gone.

There is a fear in us when it comes to our lives isn't there? There is a scary aspect to this book about God called The Bible. It says we have all sinned and fallen short of God's standards. It tells us that left to our own devices we are all doomed to eternal punishment. We go through periods of fear about what's going to happen to us when we close our eyes here for the last time, when we draw our last breath. Have we been good enough to get to heaven? Can God really overlook some of the things I've done? Is it going to be extremely hot where I'm destined for all of eternity?

Those fears are removed when like those first disciples we see Jesus for who he is, The Savior. When we see the scars in his hands and feet and realize he truly did die for our forgiveness. When we realize that he was resurrected and because he was I can be too. It's when we find Jesus real and accept him as our Lord and Savior that all our fears are gone and we know for a fact that we have an eternity to live in his presence, where he will physically stand in our presence.

When my fears are gone then I can show others how to remove theirs. This morning as we go to prayer, if you have any of those fears in your life I invite you to come forward and get them removed. I invite you to come and make Jesus real in your life.

AMEN