

“Gut Fear and Boundless Joy”

Luke 24:36-48

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Did you see the farewell flight of the space shuttle *Discovery* on Tuesday of last week? After carrying astronauts into space for almost thirty years, which made it the most traveled spaceship in history, *Discovery* was retired.

Colonel Mike Mullane was at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida to see *Discovery* begin its final voyage, this time atop a specially outfitted Boeing 747 jumbo jet to Washington, D.C. where it will go on public display at the Air and Space Museum’s Udvar-Hazy Center. Colonel Mullane was on *Discovery’s* maiden voyage on August 30, 1984, so it was only fitting he was present to see it fly one last time.

“What was it like to go into space and ride on *Discovery*?” Mullane was asked. “When you climb inside a rocket for a launch into space, two emotions grip you,” he responded, “gut fear and boundless joy. They are inseparable. You fear for your survival while looking forward to the next great adventure.”

Perhaps the disciples felt the same way that evening in the Upper Room. Fear and joy co-existed, at least for a while, as strange as it may sound.

Why were they afraid? They believed their lives were in danger. The authorities had shown no mercy in recent days, and they believed this trend would continue. It was not uncommon for the followers of a slain rebel to be killed in order to prevent further disturbances. As a result, the disciples gathered in a secret location behind locked doors.

Fear also permeated that room because confusion breeds fear, and there was a lot to be confused about. In their minds, the crucifixion should have never happened. The week that began on Palm Sunday with so much promise ended in a state of utter confusion and disbelief when the disciples saw Jesus hanging on a cross.

How could this happen to this good man they had grown to love, and in whom they placed their hopes and dreams? Why didn’t God intervene? What did the future hold for them now?

Unanswered questions like these led to fear and anxiety. So, what did the disciples do? They returned to the place where some of them shared the Passover meal with Jesus three nights earlier to discuss the events of the weekend and the rumors surrounding them.

Luke says that while the disciples were recounting the events of the weekend and processing their emotions, two disciples from Emmaus burst into the room. They had been there previously, but left to return home before dark to Emmaus, which was seven miles away. I'm sure you recall their fascinating story.

On their journey home, they were accompanied by a stranger who asked them what they were discussing. After telling their new companion about Jesus' crucifixion, they invited him into their home for the night.

When this stranger broke the bread and blessed it at dinner, they recognized him as the risen Lord. Perhaps they had been present at the feeding of the five thousand or maybe they saw the nail prints in his hands. Whatever tipped them off, it was enough to send them running back to Jerusalem in the dark to add their story to others that had been told that day.

While listening to these two disciples, the people in the Upper Room got another surprise. Jesus appeared in their midst and confirmed what they had been told. He was alive, still cared deeply for them and wanted them to continue the good work they had begun. I can only imagine the difference this made in their lives, as their grief and sorrow turned to joy and hope.

Can you identify with the disciples in that Upper Room? Is this a confusing time in your life? Like the disciples, have you been caught off guard by recent events, which have left you perplexed and fearful?

What do you do when life doesn't make sense? What did the disciples do?

The first thing they did was to reach out to each other. One by one they made their way to the Upper Room where I am confident they consoled and encouraged one another. They were not content to grieve or ponder the meaning of the empty tomb alone. They needed each other then more than ever and knew it.

Those early disciples did something else which helped clear up their confusion. They allowed Jesus, who reached out to them, to help them. They listened carefully as he reminded them of what the prophets had written, which revealed how God was at work in Jesus' life and theirs.

Do you need to follow the disciples' lead at this time in your life? Do you need to reach out to others who can help you during this difficult time and respond to Jesus, who is reaching out to you? If so, I strongly encourage you to do both.

All of us need help when life doesn't make sense. Like the disciples, we don't need to grieve or sort through our confusion alone.

Do you have a safe place to go when life doesn't make sense? Do you have a support group that will listen to you and help you to make sense of the senseless? I hope so, but if you don't, I offer our church to you.

Confused minds and broken hearts are treated kindly here. We all know what it is like to walk away from the cemetery of broken dreams to rebuild our lives. We know how much we need each other and welcome you to join us on this faith journey.

We also know how much we need Jesus when life doesn't make sense and believe he wants to help us, just as he did the disciples in the Upper Room that evening. Will you let him open your mind as you revisit the scriptures, which can shed light on your path? Will you let him speak to your heart as you pray about what you are going through?

We have found Jesus to be eager to turn adversity into teachable moments. With his help, I believe you can also discover a lot about yourself as you wrestle with the mysteries of life and faith. Will you let him help you? I am confident nothing would please him more.