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Grace and Peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ!

Have you ever started something? A new school? A new job? If you are a baseball fan you can think of the excitement of Spring training.

When Amanda first came to the USA she wanted to learn and grow and experience new things! She was so excited and a little nervous about leaving her home, family, country, and culture. She was very excited to start her new academic and life experience pursuits. It was going to be an exciting, a little scary, and completely new experience for her!

New culture, new country, new continent, new people, new education system, everything was going to be new. She wanted to learn new things, get a great education, and get new experiences. However, she didn't know exactly what all types of experiences and things she would learn.

In our Sermon text today. The disciples were starting a new time in their lives. They were entering a whole new chapter. Jesus Christ was there for them, guiding them, comforting them, and helping them along for their new adventure.

Christ is there for us too. He is guiding, helping, and equipping us.

Let's recap what the scene was like then; This is at the end of Luke. The disciples had been following Jesus. He had been teaching them and mentoring them. The disciples were gathered together, they had just lost Jesus. Jesus had been crucified.

They were sad beyond words. But then, a few days after, they heard from others that Jesus was alive. Could it be true? This was a very sad time, yet there was an uprising of Hope. From Luke 24:36-49

*<sup>36</sup> While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."*

*<sup>37</sup> They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. <sup>38</sup> He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? <sup>39</sup> Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."*

*<sup>40</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. <sup>41</sup> And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?"*

*<sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate it in their presence.*

What an amazing scene here! Jesus appears to His disciples. They were a little afraid and in disbelief. Jesus shows them His visible nail marks, they demonstrate His victory of life over death.

He heals their wounds of disbelief. He appeared to their eyes, exhibiting real flesh. He calms and refreshes their hearts. The same Jesus they used to hang out with is now in front of them.

He is alive. He is proving and showing them that indeed He has defeated death and is alive! He shows them His healed wounds. Confirming His resurrection and defeat of sin and death!

It was tough for Amanda to get her visa and get to America. First she had to get her bachelors degree, which isn't always easy. It took her several times to pass the TOEFL test, or Test of English as a Foreign Language, that is required for students in her graduate program to get a high enough score. Eventually, she was accepted conditionally.

It was difficult enough to explain to her parents that she wanted to study for a Masters degree in Education and eventually hopefully a Phd in Education. You see, her family fully expected and her to stay home, go to college in her home country of China, and eventually work in the family business. But, she had dreams of her own.

When she arrived she found everything very different. The language, the culture, the way of doing things, the way Americans think. Even though she was very excited to learn and experience, this new land was very confusing and hard for her to navigate.

She had always struggled a bit with English, however she liked it and the idea of going to the USA was always ever since she was a kid, so exciting and enchanting. She had always felt she needed to go to America. We speak English so fast here. It was very hard for her to understand what people were saying to her.

She started her academic career in the USA in the English as a Second Language or ESL program. As part of her conditional acceptance she had to take ESL classes and then retake the TOEFL.

The food in America was also very different from her home cooked Chinese food. It was a big adjustment on a daily basis. And it was a bit of a struggle to get used to. She did learn what the term "combo" meant and she learned that French fries are common and can be tasty.

Additionally, the styles of her classes and the methodologies were different from her Chinese education. It was a whole new system to get used to. The ways of teaching, the things tested, the types of tests were all different. It was a big adjustment.

She liked the campus. She liked the fresh air, the natural beauty of the campus, she was excited to learn, but things at first were difficult. She was also a bit, lonely. She didn't know anyone on campus.

Even though, she lived on campus in a dorm. Her American roommate wasn't really interested in being friends and had a different agenda for being in college.

It was a rough first semester. She had been so excited and then all the adjustments, all the changes, the loneliness, the differences, it was a struggle for her. But, she made it through that first semester.

Jesus dispelled all doubt when He showed His disciples the absolute proof of His Resurrection. He reminded them of His earlier teachings. Here He points to Himself as Scripture's center.

*<sup>44</sup> He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."*

*<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*

God opens hearts and minds through His Word and Faith.

Martin Luther said "All Scripture and the Word of God point to the suffering of Christ, as He himself declares in the last chapter of Luke, that Scripture contains nothing else than the promised grace and forgiveness of sin through the suffering of Christ, that whoever believes in Him, and none other, shall be saved."

Jesus also now includes the mission to all nations through the Holy Spirit's power. There is the danger that we keep to ourselves when Jesus is equipping us to go out. Sometimes, we can accept the fact that He is risen from the dead. Yet, we deny the mission He has sent us to do.

The Resurrected Christ truly equips us for our witness to Him, with the Holy Spirit, whom He provides. He has given us life and He wants us to go out and spread that Life and Hope to others and Share His Good News

As her next semester, the Spring semester that starts in January, began it was a typical Ohio cold wintery steel gray week and had been for a while. This too was really rough on Amanda who grew up in southern China where it is always warm.

At then end of the week, it was actually a sunny day. Amanda went to class group project meeting. At that meeting she met a very friendly girl from Taiwan. She was friendly and really seemed to take an interest in her. This girl even invited her for tea after the meeting. After tea, her new acquaintance invited her to something with other friends and students in the evening and there would be food. Amanda was hopeful and even a little excited.

At this dinner, she met even other people who were nice and seemed to really care for her. They were friendly, caring, and gave her advice about things. She also tried some new American food that was actually tasty. It was a great evening! They invited her back next week.

She saw her new friend Chung Hui, in class. This made Amanda happy. She even saw one of the students she met on Friday night on campus. Amanda was feeling a little brighter. She was excited for Friday night!

Friday night finally came. She saw the friends she had met last week and even met some new ones. Just before the dinner she even heard another encouraging message. Some one at this house was reading from a big book and the words were really encouraging and uplifting. Those uplifting words stayed in her mind.

Again she tried some new American foods. Some she thought was terrible, yet others she liked. She played some games and had a lot of fun. She met a few others with the same major, they talked about their classes. Again she was invited to come back the next week and the weeks after. She wanted to come every Friday.

Over the weekend as she was studying and being frustrated her homework assignments and a project, those uplifting words from Friday night came back to her. She calmed down and was encouraged and was able to complete her work. She wondered what those helpful words were.

When she saw her friend Chung Hui in class, she asked if Chung Hui knew what those encouraging words were from? Chung Hui told her that they were from the Bible and that the Bible has many phrases of encouragement and hope AND even greater.

After class, over tea, Chung Hui told her that she led something called a Bible study and that Amanda would be invited to join her. At these things called Bible studies, she would here teachings of encouragement, Hope, wisdom, and about someone named Jesus.

Amanda started going to these Bible studies. She also went to the Friday evening gatherings called Chat and Chows. She had friends now and felt connected. She was encouraged and she was attending Bible study and this new teaching was really different than teachings she had heard before. She was so joyful.

At the Bible study, she met other students who were nice and caring and they have questions about life. Her friend Chung Hui was very helpful, answered many questions, and very encouraging. She was also patient. Plus, Amanda and her seemed like the same teas and that was very comforting.

At this Bible study she learned about a man named Jesus Christ. She learned that this Jesus was even more than a man, he was God. He came to earth to save us, that He took all the bad

things we have done and thought, and all our bad emotions, thoughts, and our issues upon Him and He died on the cross for us.

At first this teaching was a little hard to understand. She found many teachings in the Bible study to be filled with Hope and encouragement. She learned new ideas on how to live her life in a more peaceful, kind, and wise way.

The more she attended the more she enjoyed these teachings and studying the Bible. The semester ended and this time after this semester, she was happy. She felt like she had friends, people who cared for her, she did a lot better academically, and she had experienced some things, not just her apartment and classrooms.

As she had some time off before her summer class started, and her exciting trip back home to see her family. She had some time to think about the new teachings she was experiencing. She noticed that these new people she was hanging out with were different from others. They were caring, hopeful, and were happy. They had a peace that she hadn't seen in others. She was looking forward to studying more in Bible study and being with her new friends over the summer.

She was also excited to see her family back in China. She was going home for a month and it had been almost a whole year since she had been home to see them.

When she went home it was great to see her mom and dad, her grandparents, and her friends. It was so great to taste "home cooking" again. She also ate in some very authentic and delicious Chinese restaurants.

She was a little nervous to talk with her parents about the reasons for her new happiness, friends, and the teachings she was learning. Her parents were in the Communist party and because of that they could not be religious. They could not and were forbidden to believe in God.

When she told her parents, they were concerned for her and upset about her involvement in Bible study activities. They cautioned her to be careful of those religious people and their useless teachings that could be dangerous. She didn't talk about it again to them.

When she returned back to Kent, she started her late term summer class. She also went to her Bible study, with Chung Hui and her new friends.

The Fall semester started, she had a full load of classes. And she was still in Bible study. She really loved going to Bible study and learning the teachings of Christ. She was always happy and peaceful after Bible study. She really loved going.

Amanda helped with some service events at homeless shelters. This was a totally new activity for her. She even celebrated a new holiday, called Christmas. She went to church and celebrated Jesus' birth. It was great.

The Spring semester started and she was now doing pretty well in her classes. Her English was much much better. And of course she had to make time for Bible study.

She celebrated another new holiday, called Easter. At the worship service she celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He defeated death and sin. He offered the forgiveness of our sins and relationship with God.

After the Spring semester, she prayed and thought a lot. She felt very strongly that after the last year and almost a half, that indeed she was a Christian and that she believed that Jesus Christ died for her sins. She loved the Hope and Joy that Jesus offered.

She prayed for her parents that they would understand and eventually know the hope and new life in Jesus too!

She desired to be baptized! Praise the Lord we have a new sister in Christ! Amanda got baptized on a sunny day!

Jesus gave the disciples hope and encouragement in a time of deep sadness for them. Jesus gave Amanda hope and encouragement in a time of need. He is there for us now and still offering His hope and joy! He also wanted His disciples to go out and serve others and be in mission to spread His Good News. Chung Hui heard that call and responded, Amanda sure is glad.

Jesus wants us to go out too and spread His Good News!

Now let the peace of Christ which transcends all understanding, guide your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus and may He give you comfort in your tough times and the guidance that He will be with you as you spread His Good News!