

## Easter Sunday

**Introduction:**

- A. There he was! Suddenly. Instantly. No uncanny forewarning stillness. No whoosh of air. No creaking door or footfall. It was late in the evening of the first day of the new creation. The followers of Jesus were gathered hearing incredible stories from some in the room who swore they had seen Jesus alive that day. And then—bam!—there he was, big as life. They gasped and rocked back. And Jesus said what people always said when they met: "*Shalom. Peace be with you.*" But that ancient greeting had never carried so much freight, never before had so much life in it; so much *peace* in it. It was like the very word *shalom* had been resurrected.
- B. They thought they were seeing a ghost. That's what they told Luke later and what he wrote down. Who wouldn't think that?! What else could he be? **But ghosts, of course, aren't exactly welcome guests.** Ghosts are death warmed over. They haunt. Yet what other explanation could their reeling minds find when a man they knew had died now stood there among them? Luke writes, "*They were startled and frightened.*" *Terrified*, wouldn't be too strong a word!
- C. People still don't know what to make of this story. This week there was an article in *Newseek* by **Lisa Miller** about the resurrection. She recaps the Bible story and then writes, "*This story has strained the credulity of even the most devoted believer. For, truly, it's unbelievable.*" I shook my head at that, but honestly, if Jesus' own disciples thought they were seeing a ghost, who can blame people today who cast about for natural explanations?
- D. Today instead of listening to theological spinmeisters we will listen to Luke. He was a physician and a bright man, a gifted historian and nuanced author. I do not doubt that what he knew of medicine was primitive, but that surely does not mean he was a primitive thinker, a gullible patsy for a tall tale. He tells the truth. I invite you to turn in a Bible to the last chapter of Luke (p.788) and follow with me as we look at this remarkable account: **vv.36-43...**

**I. CHRISTIAN JOY DEPENDS ON JESUS' LITERAL AND PHYSICAL RESURRECTION (24:36-43)**

- A. Look at **v.38...** Jesus takes troubled minds and doubts seriously. The Greek work Luke chose here, translated *doubt*, implied *debate*. All day long these people, who didn't want to be guilty of gullibility any more than you do, had been in intellectual turmoil. **Jesus' first order of business as resurrected Christ was to help people believe that the incredible was true.** Jesus cares about our minds. So what does he do here? He invites physical scrutiny. **V.39...** The point of looking at his hands and feet was that they could see the scars of the crucifixion. The point of eating fish was to show that his body was real. Jesus does not ask for blind faith. He doesn't even ask for a leap of faith. He started with 'seeing is believing.' Luke wrote in the beginning of his next book, Acts, that during the 40 days after his resurrection, Jesus "*gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.*"
- B. Jesus still takes troubled minds and doubts seriously, and he expects us as thinking people to consider carefully what these disciples reported. Eyewitness testimony matters! Jesus told them in **v.48**, "*You are witnesses of these things.*" That was to be their mission henceforward. To be witnesses. When the early disciples wanted to make the case that Jesus rose from the dead, they say, again and again, like John did many years later in his first letter, "*That...which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life... We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard...*" [1 Jn 1:1-3]. This is evidence that must be reckoned with, that can't be written off to superstition or gullible grief or cultivated legend.
- C. But wait a minute! All is not quite as it seems. Thinking Jesus was a ghost would make him out to be *less* than he was. **Jesus was not less than fully human; he was actually more.** The man who stood in their midst was unlike any man ever before in history. For one thing, this man had been really, really

dead. Crucifixion was overkill. The spear in his side was overkill. And yet, here he was. This was no resuscitation. This wasn't a man *recovering* from his death. This isn't one of those stories where someone says they started down the tunnel to the light and then were called back. Two whole nights had passed. He had been utterly, thoroughly dead. Yet here he was. And what's more, this was a body that could just **appear**. John, who was there that night, says *"the doors were locked for fear of the Jews"* when *"Jesus came and stood among them."* What kind of body is this?! Or for that matter, look at **Lk 24:50-51**... *"taken up into heaven."* What kind of body is this?

Let me make something clear that even devout Christians miss sometimes. Jesus' resurrected body was of a new kind. No one had ever had a body like this before. We say at Easter that Jesus *came back* to life, because we don't have another way to say it. **But Jesus didn't really come back to life. He rose to a new kind of life.** The Bible says that Jesus was a **second Adam**, created, not from dust like the first Adam, but from death. The risen Christ had pulse and breath, as we do, but he was... **unbound** by his body—appearing through locked doors, disappearing at will, and when he wished, rising into heaven—and it was a body that *could not* die. Not so much as a cell or molecule. He was immortal to the core! And that is the body that awaits us when we are born anew by faith in Jesus Christ.

- D. As I read this story I was struck with the first part of **v.41**, that says *"they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement..."* Illus.: I saw a video clip the other day of a mom and her kids, all huddled around a phone in their living room, talking to dad thousands of miles away in Afghanistan, telling him how much they missed him. But dad was actually a few feet away in the kitchen, and when he appeared and they saw him, I think you could use this phrase: *"they did not believe it because of joy and amazement."*

The paradox is that their incredulous joy is actually proof that they had begun to believe. Jesus was no ghost! He was really there. What a **reunion**! Not just with a loved one, but with the most amazing and loving person anyone has ever known. And what **relief**! Earlier that day, one of these disciples had told Jesus (without realizing he was talking to Jesus), *"We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."* That was a hope with 1000 years of heartache behind it and it had been dashed when Jesus was crucified. But now that hope was alive again. The kingdom of God really was at hand!

They also felt the joy of their own fresh start. When Jesus died, their futures died with him. There was nothing left but to go back to their old lives. When they grasped that Jesus was really alive, they didn't immediately work out, *"Now I, too, can live again after I die."* That would come later. But what they did realize was, *"Now I can live again **before** I die."* They had never been so alive as they were when they were with Jesus. On Easter Sunday, we usually focus on our hope of life after death (which is wonderful beyond words) but let us also rejoice that Jesus' resurrection offers us life now, before we die. Jesus said, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*

Illus.: It was Passover this week. Yesterday morning at Einsteins, one of my Jewish friends was telling me how he had explained to a grandchild that the famous painting, *"The Last Supper,"* actually was depicting a Passover Seder. The young person had never heard that. I agreed, and told him that quite often churches will have a Seder, because we Christians see in it such incredible pictures of Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. The conversation sort of died off at that point, and I didn't get to add, *"In fact, when Christians have a Seder, we cannot understand how Jews cannot see Jesus Christ in it all over the place."* Look at **vv.44-49**...Why did Jesus make it a point on that momentous night to *"open their minds so they could understand the Scriptures"*? Because...

## II. WE NEED THE SCRIPTURES TO MAKE SENSE OF JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION FOR OUR LIVES (24:44-49)

The irony here is that the Old Testament was, well, old. Every Jew knew it well, and knew its promises of the Messiah.

- A. But there were two particular things that even those who knew the Old Testament thoroughly seemed to have missed about the coming Messiah: v.46... They had missed that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead. It was there, but they missed it. The first hint had been when God spoke to the serpent in **Gen. 3** about the far-off offspring of the woman, Eve: *“He will crush your head,”* God said, *“and you will strike his heel.”* There’s death in that phrase but it is easy to miss. Or all those **sacrificial lambs**—the Messiah’s suffering was there in disguise. It was in their familiar songs, like **Ps. 22**, which begins, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* and ends *“They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it.” It is finished.* Jesus had earlier hinted that the death and resurrection of the Messiah was hidden in the story of **Jonah** three days in the belly of the great fish, and then spewed out like a dead man come back to life to preach God’s salvation to a wicked Nineveh. The resurrection was there when the prophet **Hosea** had written, *“After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us that we may live in his presence”* [6:2].
- B. **V.47... They had also missed why the Messiah would suffer and rise again—so that a message of repentance and forgiveness of sins could be preached to all the world!** The Jews, of course, had long been taught by God that people need to repent in order to find his forgiveness from God. Their whole religious life was built around blood sacrifices for sin. But that night, Jesus showed these wide-eyed disciples that *he* is the like the ram God provided for Abraham to sacrifice in Isaac’s place. He took them, I am sure, to **Is. 53**, *“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”* He reminded them how God’s ancient blessing on Abraham was that through him all the world would be blessed. Now here was Jesus, Abraham’s greatest son, who would be the way God’s great blessing for all the world, not only the Jews.
- C. **Vv. 48-49... They had not understood God’s promise, even in the Old Testament, that he would send his Holy Spirit in a new way once the Messiah came.** Remember the story where Ezekiel saw a field of dry bones that came to life by the breath of God? Or the prophet Joel’s mysterious promise, *“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people... And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* [2:28-32]. No one could imagine a day when all who put their faith in the Messiah, young and old, Jew and Gentile, woman and man, could be *“clothed with power from on high.”*
- D. There’s another thing that occurred to me as I thought about all these Old Testament symbols and songs, stories and prophecies pointing to Christ. In Scripture, we not only see the life-saving meaning to what Jesus has done, but we also see the grand design and love of God the Father. It was **God** who planned and promised all this. Jesus said, *“I have come to do the will of my **Father**.”* **John 3:16** says, *“For **God** loved the world so much that **he** gave **his** one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”* And in the end, when all is said and done, it will be **God** who is most overjoyed, for in that day, **Rev. 21:3** says, *“God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”*

### Conclusion:

When Jesus appeared in that room on the evening of the first day of the new creation, he said, *“Peace be with you.”* John tells us that he said it more than once. *“Peace be with you.”* John says that a week later when he finally appeared to doubting Thomas, his first words were, *“Peace be with you.”* Peace came as it had never come before, because Jesus came, bringing with him life everlasting, and life even now, to the full.

This peace is for you, if you will have it, if you will repent of living life on your own terms instead of God’s, and be forgiven through Christ.

There are among us this morning people whose health and age tell them that death is not far away, but they have peace. There are those among us who have laid in the grave those dearest to them, and whose hearts have been pocked by grief, but they have peace. There are those who are without work, or whose savings are all but gone, those who know depression or pain, but they have the peace of God that passes all understanding. And there are many here who will get up tomorrow morning and go back to work like

everyone else, but this is different: *they have the peace of God*. And I'll tell you why—because Jesus gave it to them. Jesus, risen and reigning, stands here among us and says, "*Peace be with you.*"