

3rd S. of Easter 4/14/2024
Luke 24:36-49 B

THEY WERE STARTLED AND FRIGHTENED AND THOUGHT THEY SAW A SPIRIT

Do you believe in ghosts? A poll I ran across showed that more than half of adults in the United States believe in ghosts and/or demons. There is no solid, scientific evidence that ghosts really exist. Yet, we seem to have a fascination with ghosts.

I remember when I was a kid. We would go to my grandparent's farmhouse – it was an old house with a dirt basement. My uncle would scare us that there was a dead guy buried in the basement. You would hear creaking and cracking, and he would say, "He's coming up from the basement." You know now it was just the wood creaking, but, when you're a kid, it's spooky as all get out.

Where would Hollywood be without ghosts? From a young age, we are frightened of ghosts, so Hollywood makes movie after movie about ghosts, to play off our emotions. And if you are old enough to remember black-and-white, you know it was a ghost because some guy was walking around in a white sheet. Some Hollywood guy even convinced us to pay money to see, "Casper, the friendly ghost." And, there is a thriving industry of astrologers, and psychics. Teen books about vampires are selling by the mega-millions, and zombies are all around us, coming to get us.

It seems there is a part of us that wants, just desires, just hungers and thirsts, to believe ghosts might just be real. So, maybe we shouldn't be surprised that after Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples, his closet followers were afraid and thought they saw a ghost. It is a very sad commentary on our faith that we are so open to the very

thought that ghosts just might be real, and yet we do not believe that these same bodies we see and feel this day will rise from the grave and live.

Even though Jesus came to them that Easter day and said, "Peace to you," they did not believe that what they were seeing and hearing was the fulfillment of what He Himself had told them several times, *that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, and be killed, and on the third day be raised (Mt 16:21)*. Instead, they resorted to their superstition and folk religion. The Evangelist tells us that the disciples were *startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit*.

Fear always results from sin. The wages of sin is death and death hurts, we cannot come to grips with it; we cannot control it. We certainly cannot understand it with our human reason, and we fear it. So, we try to come up with an explanation that fits our limited human reason and conclude that those who have died are still among us as ghosts or spirits. We can't prove it, so we say, "Aunt so-and-so is here. Uncle whatever is with us. I can **feel** her/his presence."

Luke records that Jesus went to great effort to convince the disciples that He wasn't a ghost; that He really was alive again. He showed them his hands and feet, still bearing the marks of the crucifixion. He invited them to touch him, so that they knew He was real flesh and bone, just as you and I are today. And when they were still disbelieving, He ask for something to eat and they gave Him a piece of fish. He ate it as further proof that He was real, because ghosts have no need of food.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! And, we will rise in Christ. THIS SUNDAY TEACHES US THE CERTAINTY THAT THE SAME BODIES THAT HAVE DIED WILL RISE AGAIN. THAT WHICH HAS

GROWN INFIRM, DIED, RETURNED TO THE DUST FROM WHICH IT CAME, AND DECAYED, WILL RISE AND LIVE.

II. The Good News of the Gospel is that God does not accept death as a fact of life. God conquers and overcomes it in His Son Jesus.

In our lesson, Jesus said it this way, *“Everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”* Then, Luke tells us, *He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.* Jesus is the key to understanding the Scriptures. Every verse points to Jesus, who would be crucified, died, buried, and rose again the third day. God’s plan to save always focused on Jesus.

For example, in Psalm 16:10, we read, *You will not abandon Me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay (NIV).* This verse, like all of the Scriptures, points to Jesus and the victory over death and the grave we have in Him.

At the time of death, the soul of the believer is immediately with Jesus in heaven. But, we must ever remember that this is temporary. God never created our souls and bodies to be apart. So, on the last day, the day Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead, He will raise the dead, and soul and body will be reunited to live in the full enjoyment of being with Jesus forever. *“For a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [My] voice and come out,”* Jesus says (Jn 5:28-29, NIV).

What Good News this is for us poor mortals! All the aches and pains, infirmities and illness which trouble our bodies this day will be no more. We will rise with glorious, incorruptible bodies. All bodily defects, which are the marks of mortality, will be removed, because these are the wages of sin. In the resurrection, our bodies will be glorified like that of Jesus on Easter morning. *Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the*

Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself, Paul teaches us (Ph 3:20-21).

I've always found it very insightful that after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the apostles in the New Testament never used the word "death". They spoke of death being a coronation, a ceasing of labor, an exodus, and sleep. For example, Paul writes, *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are **asleep** (1 Th 4:13)*. Death is but sleep for the saints of God. You go to be at night and wake up in the morning. So, it is with the grave. Our bodies rest in peaceful sleep until the day of Christ's reappearing. Jesus will awaken us and we will live.

This is Good News for us who are all too familiar with death and grieving and mourning. We will not only see our loved ones again, we will hear their voice, we will touch them; we will feel their skin and be warmed by their breath as we embrace them.

III. God the Holy Spirit has enlightened us with His gifts, so that we may be freed from not only the lies of the devil, but our superstitions, as well. We walk by **faith**, not fears caused by sin. And, that changes how we look at everything.

Job, in the misery of disease, poverty, and grief, made that marvelous confession of faith, *"I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25-26)*. In Job, we learn to look beyond the troubles and tears of today, to see the day we will rise from the grave to see God with our own eyes.

In the Creed, we confess, "I look for the resurrection of the dead." Walking by faith, not by fear or superstition, this is our confidence. We

rejoice that as Christ rose from the grave, so our bodies – the same bodies that have died -- will rise from the grave. Living in Christ, we dread the grave as little as the bed.