

Disbelieving Joy
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Luke 24: 36 – 48

³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Jesus appears to his disciples. Literally, he appears before them.
 One moment he isn't there, and then,
 in the blink of an eye he is standing right next to them.

On the one hand, it seems like this should not be such a surprise to the disciples.
 After all, Jesus told them he would be resurrected.
 They have the witness of the women
 as well as the witness of the disciples to whom Jesus appeared
 on the walk to Emmaus

You might think that seeing Jesus would not be so ~as the text tells us~ startling and terrifying.

On the other hand, I suppose that seeing the risen Christ before you would
 be a surprise no matter what the circumstances or history.

We talk about the risen Christ every Sunday,
 and I'm pretty sure startled and terrified would be the least dramatic of the words to
 describe how we would react if Jesus were to show up right here, right now.

What's reassuring, and, ~what I hope would be true for us, too~
 is that the disciples don't **stay** startled and terrified.

They quickly move to something that our
 New Revised Standard Version translates as
 “in their joy they were disbelieving.”

The sense here is really, really good.¹

Their fear is transformed into a joy that is intense,
The disbelieving is less doubt and more an understanding of their own good fortune.

Less: "Jesus, that can't be you."

More: "Jesus, this is too good for my eyes to really believe! Wow!"

Luke tells us that Jesus does various things to show them that he is not a ghost.²

In that time they didn't have Ghostbusters³ or Ghost Hunters⁴, but they did have varying beliefs about ghosts, apparitions, necromancers⁵ that Luke hoped to move the hearers past.

There is the showing of hands and feet,
Luke doesn't talk about crucifixion wounds,
This is showing the disciples flesh and bone.

Jesus eats the broiled fish.

Luke goes into lots of detail. Jesus is being presented as our risen-in-body-and-spirit Lord.

Not a vertical tower of defense here,
Luke is creating a broad horizontal landscape
in which Jesus doesn't defy one cultural understanding
of what it meant to be a spirit or a ghost,
Jesus is defying many, all of them.

He can eat. Is flesh and bone. Clears walls as well as boundaries.

Jesus isn't just bigger than one tradition,
Jesus supersedes all of them.⁶

¹ Mark Davis, "Opening their minds to Scriptures," on [Leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com](http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com)
<http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2015/04/opening-their-minds-to-scriptures.html>

² Brian P. Stoffregen, "**Luke 24:36b-48**," *Exegetical Notes at Crossmarks.com*
<http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/luke24x36.htm>



³ <http://www.ghostbusters.com>



⁴ <http://www.syfy.com/ghosthunters>

⁵ Smith, Daniel A. "Seeing A Pneuma(Tic Body): The Apologetic Interests Of Luke 24:36-43." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72.4 (2010): 752-772. *ATLASerials, Religion Collection*. Web. 19 Apr. 2015.

⁶ Prince, Deborah Thompson. "The 'Ghost' Of Jesus: Luke 24 In Light Of Ancient Narratives Of Post-Mortem Apparitions." *Journal For The Study Of The New Testament* 29.3 (2007): 287-301. *ATLASerials, Religion Collection*. Web. 19 Apr. 2015.

That's the context for this passage.

The good news, **however**, is what follows.

The scriptures are opened to the disciples.

Jesus does what Jesus does. Jesus teaches.

“Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,”

or, more literally,

“Then he made open-minded their mind

to the like-mindedness of the writings/scriptures.”

Their eyes are opened. Through the lens of the resurrection, the proclamation, call, and claim of God become clear to them.

And it leads to one thing.

“You are witnesses of these things.”

What does it mean to be a witness to these things?

To be a witness to the resurrection?

Does it speak of what is to come or what is here and now?

D. Mark Davis writes,⁷

The usual course of resurrection-speak lessens the value of life by positing that, since there is life after death, the reality of death is nullified into a simple passageway from a lower form of being to a higher one. That, in turn, diminishes the meaning and value of life as we know it into nothing more than a necessary pilgrimage toward that passageway.... [this] usual course of resurrection-speak is unfaithful to the biblical tradition. When God speaks to Moses through the fiery bush—disclosing that as God lives so live Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—it was not to say, “Tell my people to put up with slavery because I will reward them later.” It was a call to liberation, to throwing off the shackles of the Empire by the power of the living God. The hermeneutics of resurrection is not a fatalistic capitulation to the inevitable death of all things. It increases the value of life—life of the earth, life of the community, even life of the enemy—because where there is life, there is God.

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When we are witnesses to these things, it means that the praying, the worshipping we do in here is only as good and authentic as it changes the ways in which we live out there.

⁷ Mark Davis, “The Politics of Resurrection Hermeneutics Luke 24: 36-48,” on www.politicaltheology.com
<http://www.politicaltheology.com/blog/the-politics-of-resurrection-hermeneutics-luke-2436-48/>

Or, to say, that going to church means BEING the church,
radical and brave, out in the world.

Praying with our feet.

Praising God with our hands.

Singing hymns with our very lives, like the one we sang a few moments ago that includes these words:

*All the winter of our sins,⁸
long and dark, is flying
from the Light to whom we give
laud and praise undying.*

As you read in the bulletin, I'll be spending this week with my preaching group called "The Well Rebecca Messman is a part of the group. Rebecca an amazing and gifted pastor in Herndon, Virginia.⁹ And a few years ago she told us this story, and gave us permission to re-tell it.¹⁰ She said:

A few weeks ago, I read the story of a body that had been found in a creek in the Hiddenbrook neighborhood where many of our church folks live. His name was William.¹¹

You all know that one of the great joys of my life has been Lunch for the Soul,¹² the weekly lunch with the day laborer community of Herndon. It has been our church's way of walking together through what was a bitter immigration debate that was splattered all over the Washington Post, [exposing fault lines across the community].

But, eating together, worshipping together, week after week, has started a parade, a visible movement in the community that something is changing, and we are in it together. It has been great fun! And I'll admit, I didn't mind enjoying the weekly party and returning to ministry as usual when it was done.....

[Until the week before Palm Sunday,] when Antonio stopped by my office.

Antonio was William, the deceased's, uncle. He had smuggled William into the States a year ago because William had witnessed a gang killing in El Salvador, and they thought coming to the States might save him. Grief-stricken and scared, upon the news that the gang had found William here, Antonio looked for a church. He didn't have one. Jose was Antonio's friend and brought him to my office, wondering if we could have the service at Trinity. William had come to Trinity a handful of times for Lunch for the Soul.... We were their church.

Antonio was terrified and not sleeping because the gang was threatening him too, with menacing text messages and phone calls. I confess [my friend Becca said] to being freaked out to be so close to something that was far from wrapped up. The head of our deacons whom I had to call anyway about this funeral was

⁸ https://hymnary.org/text/come_ye_faithful_raise_the_strain

⁹ <http://www.trinityherndon.org> <http://www.trinityherndon.org/content.cfm?id=315>

¹⁰ This story was told at the meeting of The Well (a lectionary study group) at our 2015 meeting in Chicago.

¹¹ <http://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/Body-Found-in-Herndon-Park-296471891.html>

¹² <http://www.trinityherndon.org/lunch-for-the-soul>

also a Fairfax county police officer. I told her, “Hey Nancy, I might watch too much TV but I feel like I should let you know the circumstances around William’s death.” She said, “I know, and there’s more to it than you need to know, or than even the family knows, but I’ve made some calls, we’ll be safe. You won’t notice who is here protecting us but it’ll be safe.” I said, “Nancy, just curious, you think this is the right thing to do?” She said, “Of course, this is what church does. We are their church.”

Then, [a colleague] and I did the service, the afternoon of Palm Sunday, little bits of sticks from Sunday morning still ground into the sanctuary carpet. The casket was open the whole time. I’d say grown men were crying, but they were babies... 20 year olds who had left their countries for the same damn reason William left... just to survive, to catch a break. They were so hurt and angry. And the women brought pupusas and salsa and put them on the table next to the Safeway cookies and homemade lemon bars from Trinity folks, even people from the Hiddenbrook neighborhood. It was work of the people.

There we all were on Palm and Passion Sunday, crying and singing together, realizing that the point of our being together had never been just to be together, no matter how fun and fabulous we might have felt in our weekly celebrations. The point of being together was so that we could walk together through the worst evil this world has to offer, through death, to the resurrection that God has been orchestrating all along.

We aren’t called to become the Body of Christ, we ARE the body of Christ.

Being the church in order to go to church,
radical and brave, out in the world.

Be witnesses to the resurrection:¹³

the truth that saves,
the truth that heals,
the truth that forgives,
the truth that hopes.

We are witnesses to
The wounded as well as the wounders
The possessing as well as the dispossessed
The voices crying out for justice as well as those refusing to see.
The Face we see in the mirror as well as
the face we go out of our way to avoid.

We are witnesses,
praying for the courage to go where it goes, this truth.

¹³ Influenced/inspired by Karoline Lewis, “Resurrection Witnesses” on www.workingpreacher.com
<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3587>

As people who are **still wondering** in amazement, that Jesus is in our midst,
learning and growing in faith as we walk and live and witness, together.

It is no little thing.

It is no less the wonder of God in flesh, being risen from death on the third day,
gathering with those he loved
eating a favorite meal
sharing in the grace of the Word, opened to them
and the vision of a world, this world, that, through God's love,
can be resurrected, too.