

You Are My Witnesses

Luke 24:36-49

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Synopsis:

The good news of Easter is not that our souls are immortal, or that hope springs eternal. The good news of Easter is that the bodily resurrection of the crucified Jesus is God's plan to enable us to carry the gospel to the nations.

I.

The word *gospel* means good news, coming from the Greek word *euangellion*, which refers to the proclamation of a herald that something great has happened.

This morning Christians proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. What is this news and why is it good for you and me.

II.

Resurrection Means Real Hope:

Luke 24:39 "a ghost does not have flesh and bones"

Many people still hold the vague and uninformed hope that something about us humans is immortal, meaning that after we die an ethereal substance floats heavenward, as smoke rises from a fire. The Jews never believed in immortality; historic Christianity also never believed in immortality. Week by week we affirm *not* that we are immortal, but the "resurrection of the body," as the creed proclaims.

When Jesus appears to the gathered disciples in Jerusalem, they first think he is a ghost—meaning an ethereal substance arising from the dead.

E.g. Disney's Haunted House, where a ghosts joins you in your car

When Jesus shows up, they think he is a ghost. They're startled, terrified, doubting—all appropriate reactions to something they do not expect.

E.g. Tower of Terror with Tait

We have so cartooned ghosts that they seem comic—remember Casper the Friendly Ghost? But if you have ever been really frightened, you know that it's no cartoon. The disciples are undone and don't know what to say or do.

So, Jesus assures them; “Shalom,” he says. This doesn’t help, so he shows them his hands and his feet. “Touch them,” he instructs.

You can imagine them reaching out their fingers gingerly—sort of like touching a stove burner to see if it’s hot. They don’t know how to interpret what they are seeing. It doesn’t compute.

So, Jesus tries again. “I’m hungry, got any fish tacos around here?” They provide him with some fish, and then watch him eat.

These demonstrations point to something beyond immortality, a continuity with the crucified Jesus and yet different. The risen Jesus is neither a corpse come back to life nor an ethereal spirit of the dead. God raised the crucified and buried Jesus to *new life*.

Why is this important for us? It’s important because in Jesus Christ the real you, not some part of you, or your old worn out body, hopes for redemption.

I don’t know about you, but I am not too excited about living forever if it means my life just goes on. I want to be free from sin, free from the miseries I have dumped upon others and they have dumped upon me. I want right relationships and the power to do the right thing.

E.g. My Dad: I want to have a right relationship with him

I also am not too excited if my beaten up old body, with pins in my toes and a flabby belly, is raised. I want a new body, maybe a new and improved Jeff McCrory.

This is the real hope that the resurrection holds. If we trust in Jesus, we can experience the first fruits of a new life right now, a life God will raise from the dead when we die. Don’t settle for vague immortality or a revived corpse. God offers bodily resurrection in Jesus Christ.

III.

Resurrection is God’s Plan:

Luke 24:44 “Everything written about me in the law of Moses . . .”

Some of us think that because resurrection is a surprise to the disciples, it is also a surprise to God. You know, God sees what's happening—whoops Jesus dies!—and moves to Plan B.

Once the disciples realize that a resurrected—not an immortal or a revived corpse—Jesus is standing before them, Jesus begins telling them that God has planned this all along.

Jesus instructs them, “Everything written about me in the Torah of Moses (first five books of Bible), the Prophets (the next section of the Bible), and the Psalms (a reference to the third section of the Jewish Bible) must be fulfilled. Jesus doesn't quote a single verse and say, “This exact prediction came true in this particular way.” He says that the whole of Scripture, their Bible, points to Jesus. What does he mean?

Let me suggest that the story of God told in the Bible comes in three movements.

1. The Messiah suffers: When God comes into the world, God comes to die for sinners. This is what the covenant history of Yahweh with Israel points to. God's story culminates thus on the cross. (USE KNOTTS BERRY FARM Hal lost story)
2. The Messiah rises on the third day: God's suffering on our behalf is victorious. The cross is not the last word. God absorbs death into himself that we might have new life.
3. Finally, the good news of repentance and forgiveness enabled by the cross and resurrection is meant to reach not just the in-crowd (Israel) but the out-crowd (the nations). The good news is a light to the nations, as Isaiah tells us (Isa 49:6)

This is how the Scriptures are fulfilled in Jesus.

Let me boil it down as much as possible. God has a story, which the Bible tells, and that story is God's search to fix our brokenness. God does this *not* by demanding that we get out act together—“Buck up you sinners!”—but by coming himself to suffer in our place, not just to fix us, but to fix everyone. That's the good news, the gospel.

The disciples experience Jesus alive again, but they don't understand. So, Jesus teaches them that the Thursday betrayal, the Friday crucifixion, and the Sunday resurrection are God's story with them and for the world.

IV.

Resurrection Means You Have a Job: Luke 24:48 “You are witnesses”

The disciples realize that Jesus is alive; they now know that he died so that they might repent and receive forgiveness. They could have remained in Jerusalem and started a little Jesus club. They could have gathered for pancake breakfasts to celebrate. But there's much more.

God's actions in Jesus Christ are not just for you and me. They are for the world. The resurrection is a light to the nations, as Isaiah says (49:6). The good news is good because it is not a private truth for you and me. It is a public truth for every human.

How are these humans going to learn this good news? God chooses to bring the good news through us as we encounter our friends and neighbors with the Jesus story in word and deed. God chooses this path because we don't live in isolation; we live in the context of relationships—brother, sister, husband, wife, father, mother, friend. Just look around you this morning.

Jesus says *not*, “I will communicate the good news individually through your mystic meditation,” *but*, “Y'all (together) are my witnesses.”

This means that the gospel of Jesus Christ moves from person to person, from community to community, as we get out of here. This is the purpose of the church. We are not here to be a Jesus club; we are here to be a launching pad for evangelizing the community, or we are not the church of Jesus Christ.

How does this work? Jesus tells the disciples that they will be clothed with power from on high. When you and I gather to pray for the Holy Spirit, we receive power to do that which we could not do on our own.

My prayer this Easter is that we would experience new life in Jesus Christ, understand it as God's plan from the Bible, and feel the Holy Spirit push us out of here to bless the nations. As we do this, we are God's witnesses.

Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed!