

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we are looking at the second resurrection appearance in Luke's gospel. The first is the story of the appearance of Jesus on the road to Emmaus. It does not appear among our readings in Eastertide in Year B because the bulk of the resurrection appearance passages in this church year are from John. However, this second appearance story is the equal of the better-known road to Emmaus account in what we can learn from it about what eyewitnesses recorded of their encounters with the risen Christ. It includes some unique elements: (1) the *corporeality* of the risen Christ (that is, he now exists, in a form that is recognizable, as a human "body" rather than a spirit only); (2) the commissioning of the disciples and the promise that they will be given power from on high; (3) the announcement of the coming ascension, and (4) worship by the disciples in the temple.

Luke's traditions "about the resurrection and post-Easter movements of the disciples contradict Mark and Matthew which postulate a return to Galilee and encounters with the risen Lord there." This may well be that Luke has access to forms of oral or written sources other than those available to the other evangelists. But "the explicit order to remain in Jerusalem until the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost" appears to be an intentional correction of the tradition that the disciples fled back to Galilee. This may also have to do with Luke's overall project which included not only a gospel account but also a second book, *The Acts of the Apostles* which posits a Pentecost event based on the disciples remaining in Jerusalem for the coming of the Spirit. The words "beginning from Jerusalem" thus have particular meaning for Luke.

By opening the Gospel with "the angel's appearance to Zechariah as he is serving in the Temple and concluding with Jesus' disciples blessing God in the Temple," Luke begins and ends his story in the same place. Since Zechariah and Elizabeth are "perfect models of Jewish piety," rejoicing and praising God in the temple represents the ideal piety of the Jerusalem church during the first days of its existence." You will recall that Zechariah was in the sanctuary of the Lord at the Presentation of Jesus and the lovely canticle attributed to him is used in both morning and evening prayer: the *Nunc Dimittis*--- "*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all ...*" The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple was of great importance to Luke and to his version of the life of Jesus. It was here – very early in his account -- that Zechariah announced he had personally beheld the long-expected Messiah.

In reading the resurrection appearances, it is helpful to try to recapture the sense of *amazement, fear, and even terror* which gripped those who encountered their Lord after the crucifixion. We, of course, have heard these passages so often, and analyzed them so tirelessly that to go further in our examination of the familiar requires a real effort. But we need to think about this a bit, because Luke tells us the witnesses were "startled" and "terrified" because they thought they were in the presence of a ghost. This

state of confusion and disbelief grew out of the genuine sense of amazement they felt in encountering a reality which was totally beyond their experience and understanding. A ghost would have been easier to deal with than this utterly new phenomenon: beholding their beloved Lord after his death in a form we would have to call a “body” despite its differing substantially from what our normal understanding would permit. Again, try to put yourself back into that situation in order to really comprehend what is going on here. When you do, the passage takes on a whole new quality.

And Jesus assures them that he is not a ghost. His proofs are (a) seeing his hands; (b) touching him; and (c) eating in front of them. The reason this is important is not only that the disciples are grappling with something nearly impossible for them to imagine but also that the form in which Jesus appears here overturns our usual conception of “life after death.” This is because the Greek notion of “an immortal, indestructible, disembodied soul which comes into the body at birth and returns to God at death” has thoroughly influenced our view of immortality viewed through a Christian lens. But this Greek idea which grew up in the great philosophical tradition of the ancient Greeks, despite its immense influence, is not rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition at all but is at odds with it. The Greeks often held that the soul was trapped in a human form which was inferior and alien to itself. Escape at death was therefore a triumph of the ineffable over the tangible. That is not at all a Jewish view which celebrated life itself *in all of its manifestations* and regarded it as a holy gift from God the Creator.

The Christian confession is that the body is resurrected. Let me repeat that: the body is resurrected, there is no disembodied spirit which floats free of the body at death. For Jews, this would not have been any kind of life worth living. The life Jews knew only had meaning when it embraced all of the things we know in life from eating to dancing, to sleeping, to developing friendships, to worshipping, to relaxing in one’s time off from work, to having a sexual existence ---- all of the human activities that require a body to actually be experienced. So, despite ideas we have all grown up with about life after death, the actual Christian belief is rooted in the “resurrection of the dead at the end of time” and their re-embodiment in The Great Resurrection. The idea that grows out of biblical belief is that a true re-birth at the end of time will mean that we will come back in a new form but a bodily one. Otherwise, it isn’t any kind of life as we’ve come to know it. It’s simply a spiritual encounter among billions of disembodied spirits. If you think about it, you’ll see what it is that I’m saying.

And you’ll understand why Jesus eats fish to demonstrate that he is *still alive* or has been *re-born* in some very new sense of the words *birth* and *life*. Or why the disciples when they encounter the risen Lord at first do not recognize him and continue in the dark until some human quality such as a voice brings the realization that they are in the presence of a living being ---- and, in this case, the Lord Himself. The point of Jesus showing the disciples his hands and feet is to demonstrate that he has “bones” (as it were,) because ghosts and other spirits do not have bones. He asked them for meat “for the express purpose of showing them that He had teeth.” Ghosts do not have teeth. Ghosts do not experience hunger or rid themselves of hunger by eating regular food. Let me be clear, however, that I am not being critical of

what individual Christians have come to believe about “life after death.” What I am talking about here is what the church has always taught, and sometimes our individual outlooks differ from that of institutional Christianity.

Nevertheless, what I’ve been referring to here is perhaps the hardest part to understand about resurrection. It takes St. Paul a long chapter in I Corinthians to “thrash it out.” So, Resurrection does not mean *going to heaven*. In the Jewish world of the first century resurrection meant “*a new embodied life in God’s new world.*” But the new body we inherit at the end of time “is not identical to the previous one. In an act of new creation parallel only to the original creation itself, God will make a new type of material, no longer subject to death, out of the old one.” The new body “will belong in both dimensions of God’s world, in both heaven and earth.” Heaven and earth finally joined together into one.

The other idea we struggle with in the resurrection accounts is the whole notion of *repentance*. We are told that “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to *all nations.*” So, we need to remind ourselves that “the Bible always envisaged that when God finally acted to fulfil all the promises made to Abraham, Moses and the prophets, then the whole world would be brought into the embrace of God’s saving and healing love.” But where we get confused is in limiting this to the individual experience. Naturally, the process involves individual people, but the larger point is that only through the participation of *the whole world* can God’s agenda be accomplished. And that means that it extends well beyond the individual to the whole of society, to whole nations, to entire peoples.

Repentance and forgiveness, then, are concepts that go well beyond the individual. Imagine for a moment the extent to which human history is marked by conflicts of all kinds with opposing sides, each of which claims to have truth on its higher moral ground. But if we reflect on this, we know that this is not possible. We cannot all be right. We cannot all be completely innocent. “The only way forward is the one we all find the hardest at every level: *repentance and forgiveness* --- things which are extremely difficult to bring about. “Jesus promised his followers that they would be equipped with power from God to engage in their new tasks; the book of Acts (also written by the author of St. Luke’s gospel) is the story of what began to happen as a result of this process getting underway. And that process results directly from not only the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth but his resurrection which demonstrated God’s vindication of his only-begotten Son and the gift of his loving message of reconciliation for all of humankind.

O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith that we may behold him in all his redeeming work. Amen.

Sources: N. T. Wright, Luke for Everyone, SPCK, London, 2001; PHEME PERKINS, Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Cambridge, U.K.; Brian P. Stoffregen, “Luke 24: 36b-48,” *Exegetical Notes*, www.crossmarks.com; Lucy Lind Hogan, “Commentary on Luke 24: 36b-48,” www.workingpreacher.org; Scott Hoezee, “Easter 3B,” *Center for Excellence in Preaching*, <https://cep.calvinseminary.edu>; Richard Swanson, “Commentary on Luke 24: 13-35” www.workingpreacher.org; Peter W. Marty, “April 15, Easter 3B,” <https://www.christiancentury.org>; David Ewart, “Holy Textures, Luke 24: 36b-48,” www.holytextures.com