

Fish for Lunch
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 First Presbyterian Church – New Bern
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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 Casper⁴, 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. Walls cannot stop him, but his body is real. Jesus defies expectations and boundaries.⁶

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,

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 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casper_the_Friendly_Ghost_in_film

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.

“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?

What does this mean? What is Jesus saying here?

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.... [Resurrection as Jesus shares it is] 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.

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. In other words, when we are witnesses to these things, it means that the praying, the worshipping we do in here changes the ways in which we live out there. Not for something in the future, but for here. For now.

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

Praying with our feet.

Singing hymns with our lives.

Witnessing to the risen Christ.

This past week, I gathered with a group of preachers that I’ve been gathering with annually for the past 16 years. We worship together, study together, write for one another, and so much more. As I thought about this text, and the way this gathering around table transformed the disciples, I remembered something one of the members of our group, the Rev. Rebecca Messman, shared with us about an event that happened at her church in 2015 that transformed them in a similar way.

It started with a news story.⁸ A body had been found in the nearby
Hiddenbrook neighborhood. Becca heard the story, but didn’t dwell on it, until a few

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/)

⁸ This story was told at the meeting of The Well (a lectionary study group) at our 2015 meeting in Chicago. This event happened in 2015.

days later when Antonio came by her office and told her that the body they'd found was the body of his nephew, William. Antonio was not a member of Becca's congregation, she knew him through their weekly lunch program for day laborers, "Lunch for the Soul." A ministry the congregation had begun years before, It had been started in the midst of a bitter immigration debate that had been splattered all over newspapers and community conversation. This was the congregation's way of finding a way to walk through difficult times together. 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 was a highlight of each week.

That's how Becca knew Antonio. And, how she came to realize that she had known William, too.

Antonio was William'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 Lunch for the Soul.... We were their church.

Of course the church would have the service, Becca told him.

There was more.

Antonio was terrified and not sleeping because the gang was threatening him too, with menacing text messages and phone calls. Becca affirmed they would have the service, but this time her yes was slightly less joyful. She wondered if it was safe. If it was wise. She called one of her deacons, the deacon who would be in charge of the reception who was also a police officer and asked about the safety of having the funeral. Her deacon reassured her that the police were aware. That they might not be seen, but they would be watching. And then Becca asked her, "Is this the right thing to do?" The deacon did not miss a beat. "Of course, this is what church does. We are their church."

"The service happened 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 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 church folks and neighborhood folks. 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."

The resurrection that God has been orchestrating all along, that the disciples began to see that day around the table as they ate fish together and Jesus taught them.

As Jesus teaches us.

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

We are not a cause, we are a community.

Being the church in here in order to be the church, out in the world.

Not for some far off future, as Jesus reminds us, it's for the resurrection happening right here and right now. That God makes possible.

Witnesses to the resurrection:⁹

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

We are witnesses,

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

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 together- whether it's fish or lemon bars and pupusas
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.

⁴⁵ *Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,*

⁹ Influenced/inspired by Karoline Lewis, "Resurrection Witnesses" on www.workingpreacher.com
<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3587>