

Luke 24:36-48 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

³⁶While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."^[a] ³⁷They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Look 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." ⁴⁰And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.^[b] ⁴¹While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴Then 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." ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah^[c] is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses^[d] of these things.

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Luke 24: 36-48

Ghost Jesus

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They thought that they were seeing a ghost. Well, yeah. All the post-resurrection stories of Jesus have a rather unsettling quality about them. He appears. He disappears. He shows the disciples the zombie like wounds of the undead. He speaks of having a physical presence, just like them: bones, muscles, flesh. He asks for and eats some of their leftover lunch. And yet, at the end of this chapter Jesus gets carried up into heaven like he's riding on an invisible trapeze to God.

These stories REALLY seem weird because so much of scripture does make plain sense to us. Even other "supernatural" type events don't require quite as much suspension of our beliefs about reality. Plausible explanations are out there for floods, and plagues, and what the people then called "miracles." Mostly, our Bible offers us a glimpse into history, telling us about kings and queens, war and peace, uprisings and dispersions, planting and harvesting, getting sick and being healed. The complex variety of voices in our text has always spoken to us in wise words about everyday life – like how to handle accounts with neighbors, and how not to treat a brother or sister. In the pages of our Holy Book we have origin stories, and hero stories, and prophetic revelations, and heartfelt prayers, and a blueprint for discipleship. We can read narratives about the central character of our religious tradition that show his life through multiple lenses to create the larger than life persona known to us as Jesus. Even in the details that irritate us, we can see real people with real problems and prejudices they face and sometimes even overcome.

Our biblical canon is an incredible compilation when you think about it. Other religions have meaningful revelation in their sacred texts as well, but the Bible spans such a long time period and tracks the development of religious thought through a massive denominational split from the coherence of Judaism, to Christianity that had both Jew and Gentile strains competing for authenticity. It seems to me that it must be unique in offering a critique of religion within a text about the incredible value and meaningfulness of adhering to a particular set of faith values. In the very same text, the stories are told of how religious scribes and Pharisees were some of the very ones responsible for sending Jesus to his execution. We don't discard the older texts in favor of the new. Somehow we see coherence in the story that is the real life story of human beings and their struggle for relationship on a spiritual level with their Divine Source.

So in this weird story, something happens that ties the whole thing together, and I do believe that the presence of Christ which knows no spiritual or physical limitation helped the disciples see something in a way they couldn't before. After Ghost Jesus convinces them to listen up, he tells them that he's come to fulfill history as they've known it. He is the fulfillment of the law, the fulfillment of the prophets, and the very essence of the prayers prayed in the Psalms. He opened their minds to understand that it's one long and complicated story about God's love for humankind. There is no Old Testament and New Testament, no BC and AD, no us and them. It's all put together. It's all ONE story, and it's HOLY.

Funny, isn't it that that's what he had to come back to say. Don't keep dividing. Don't put wedges between. Because we still keep doing that. And we've probably improved on how nasty we can be about it. For when you fulfill the law, and prophets, and prayers of hundreds of years so that you're loving presence can be known for the next couple thousand years, you want

to get it right. You want people to listen and understand. Whatever he did opened up **their** minds **that** day. But how long did that last? I'm guessing not very long.

Jesus needed to tell us that our physical reality and our spiritual reality were even closer together than we could have imagined. All those dualities are of our own making. As I heard Father Richard say in a recent podcast, when you're little, you only learn short because it's the opposite of tall. We make distinctions at first to learn language and life skills, but then somewhere along the line, we also put values on those things. Tall is good, short is not. The physical world is real. The spiritual world is somehow imaginary. It's so much a part of our thinking that we can't NOT think that way most of the time.

It's only in glimmers of truth that we get it. It's in having our minds opened to the reality Christ came back to share, even if it's only for a couple seconds at a time. Look, the disciples' minds were open, and they got it, at least for a few seconds they got it. We've been trying to figure out God's Word and understand our physical and spiritual reality since cognition got the better of us.

I had a dawning realization this week thinking about a couple of the places that I go to regularly. Brett and I met on Friday at the seminary library to go over a few things, and I thought about what kind of information is held there. What Jesus opened up for the disciples fills pages and pages of books, volumes upon volumes of information that sits in several floors of an exclusively theological library at Union Seminary. We are still trying to get the scriptures to open up to us. We find pieces of that truth in word studies, and history, and in multiple Christian faith traditions. It is an amazing amount of knowledge that Jesus sums up by saying, I am the culmination of the law, and prophets, and prayers. After seeing Brett, I drove over to meet

Chuck at the Science Museum. The Science Museum represents to me the history of how we've been looking at our physical world to try to understand the same reality. We want our natural reality to open up for us, to give us that aha or that eureka where at least a part of it makes sense. But what we can see, there too, we see only in parts, only through a dark reflective mirror, Jesus identifies a perfectly clear focus. It is a wholeness that we often dare not try to describe, for as soon as we do, it vaporizes and is gone to us.