

# The Same or Different?

Luke 24:36b-48

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By

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To the extent possible, effort has been made to preserve the quality of the spoken word in this written adaptation.

Where do you go when you want to get away from it all? Sometimes life becomes a burden, overwhelming, and you just want to get away. Where do you go? Some simply go to the TV with a pint of ice cream, or a half-gallon! (Go big or go home!). Netflix movies have become a great escape. Perhaps you retreat to the mountains or the desert. Or maybe you have a favorite place in Hawaii or Las Vegas where you can escape. Possibly you go to the golf course, or the shopping mall, or the gym, or go for a hike. You don't really care, you just want to get out of the house and get away. How many of us feel like we need a vacation today?

Luke tells the story of two people who wanted to get away from it all and set out on a journey to Emmaus. Some of their friends were hiding in a room somewhere with the curtains closed. Jesus had burst suddenly and brilliantly on the scene of human history. And some said that they caught sight of the purposes of God for human life in what he said and did. Suddenly it ended outside the city walls in an agony of noise, and confusion, and darkness with the sound of a hammer echoing across the valley. Afterwards most people shrugged their shoulders and walked down the hill and back to life as usual. No one really thought much of the whisper that swept like a gentle breeze across the city three days later, "He is risen!" It was an astounding claim and completely illogical. Two of them had to get away from it all for a while, so they set out for Emmaus. Emmaus is "wherever you go and whatever you do to get away from it."

Two friends of Jesus were trying to hang on to Christ when the rest of the world around them behaved as if Christ never existed. Or if he did, it didn't make any difference.

"He is risen!" We know the report and it just seems so wild and so crazy when so many more plausible and more manageable things have happened since. But whatever words we find for trying to say what happened or whatever words we try to water it down with, what happened was, Jesus wasn't dead anymore. And he wasn't a ghost either. He was the same, but different.

According to a television news report on ABC this week, in Las Vegas (another common getaway), “The secret behind one of magician David Copperfield’s most famous illusions was revealed in a courtroom Friday as part of a lawsuit he faces. His attorney explained how the popular vanishing crowd trick works during the court hearing. Gavin Cox, a former participant, is suing Copperfield, MGM Grand, and a construction company because he said he was badly injured during a 2013 performance in Las Vegas.” In the illusion, 13 people disappear from a suspended cage on stage and reappear in the back of the audience. It has been done with more than 100,000 audience members over the past 15 years. “The curtains are dropped. The participants who are in the platform are removed from the platform,” said Copperfield’s attorney. The trick involves the participants rushing off the stage and taking a route to end up in the back of the theater. Cox said there was chaos backstage during his participation and that he fell in a dark construction zone, suffering permanent brain damage. Copperfield’s representatives said the trick has been done for 15 years with no issues. Copperfield is expected to testify next week and may be pressed to reveal more on how the trick is done.

The attorneys for Copperfield and MGM Grand sought to keep opening statements, closing arguments and other portions of the trial in which the details of the magician’s illusions were discussed, closed to the public and the media. They argued that those details are considered trade secrets, but Cox’s attorney argued that people other than Copperfield, including former audience participants, know what is involved in carrying out the trick.

This scandal over a magician’s trick this week in court in a favorite getaway — Las Vegas — is nothing compared to the scandal in the first century in Jerusalem and I can’t help you avoid it. Is the resurrection just a carefully constructed illusion? These reports tell us that they were scared out of their minds on Easter morning. And they were shocked and surprised after what they had seen, to see Jesus walking back into their lives, especially because they were trying to get away from it all. And the emphasis of these reports is not so much about how people respond but on what God reveals. Luke goes to great lengths to show that this was not something these people expected, or even wanted. The resurrection of Jesus scared them to death. And it wasn’t some magician’s trick. Nothing they knew about life, death, and reality prepared them for what they experienced.

Was this “fake news?” The writers bend over backwards to show that the minds and hearts of the people hearing the reports were terribly skeptical. First century people knew the difference between a marvelously good story and an account of what actually happened. They had the same experience of doubt and confusion that any one of us would have in hearing this report.

So these two men go looking for a place to bury the brokenness of their lives and instead they found someone life could not bury. They headed to Emmaus looking for one thing but they found something completely different. It was like Columbus heading out to find India but instead discovering a whole new world.

And for these people their situation was much the same but also different. As their guest broke bread, it dawned on them that they could accept the brokenness of life . . . as a part of living. And yet in the brokenness, they found someone whose living presence with them would help them live with that brokenness . . . and beyond it, and above it, and around it. The way they described it, the brokenness remained but the glory came through anyway.

If you're like me, you may be looking for a world in which there is no estrangement or bitterness or depression. No war of any kind, no racism or class struggle, no poverty or pollution. No disease, no suffering. Nothing but love, love, and more love. But I'm on the wrong track.

And if I'm satisfied with the world as I find it; if I'm satisfied with the shabbiness of my own life, I'm also on the wrong track. But if I can see that there will be brokenness in this world as well as breakthrough, and that brokenness may be a necessary prelude to a breakthrough of God, I may be on the right track. I may just find a living Christ breaking into the brokenness of my experience. My life, at whatever stage, isn't over. It's just beginning! If Christ is alive, the effort we've spent in living isn't lost, it was just invested. Easter just keeps happening. Death doesn't get bypassed, but in a totally unexpected way it gets surpassed.

These two stories together, the Emmaus road experience where Jesus is not recognizable and this one today where he is, point to the mysterious but real nature of resurrection. The resurrected Christ is the same but different. And the real central claim of the text is that Easter is the fulfillment of all the witness of the Scriptures and God's unfolding plan for salvation. It brings to fruition God's plans and purposes. The crucified and resurrected Christ provide the clue for understanding and unlocking the mystery. The verb "opened" in verse 24:45 is the same Greek word used earlier in the chapter when the eyes of the two walking to Emmaus were "opened" (vs. 31) and when Jesus in turn "opened" the Scriptures to them (vs. 32). "Then he opened their minds to understand . . ."

But he didn't just leave them with understanding. He gave them a task, "... that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations . . . You are witnesses of these things." Openness! How open are you really? Are you just trying to get away from it all or are you leaning into life?. Faith in Christ doesn't take us out of the world. We are the same, but different!

Here's a woman in her 40s. She feels unhappy about getting older. She took her daughter for her first horseback riding lesson. As a girl she had always wanted to learn to ride but was unable to do so. At least her daughter would learn, she thought. But taking her daughter added to her sense of depression. She felt her own life was nearly over, and it would always be incomplete because she had not fulfilled her childhood dreams. Back at home she ran across a little book her daughter had made when she was eight years old in third grade. On the front she saw the title, "The Me Book." The book chronicled her daughter's life up to that point in just eight pages. One for each year of her life, and on each page was a photograph of the daughter at that age.

Slowly the mother turned the pages looking at her daughter's pictures. It made her even sadder. Her daughter looked so young, and she felt so old. Then she came to the last page. She expected it to say, "The End." But it didn't. It said, "The Beginning." The mother shook her head. It took a moment for the meaning to sink in. The teacher had the students write "The Beginning" on the last page instead of "The End" because their lives were only beginning at that point. And a little sunshine began to break into the mother's life again. Her own life wasn't at the end, it was only beginning! That changed her attitude.

She decided it wasn't too late to learn to ride a horse. She asked the daughter's instructor and soon she was sitting on a horse riding around the track too.

She had learned something: never to think of any time as the end of your life, for every time is only the beginning of the rest of it. Even death itself, since Christ is risen, is the beginning of life beyond our wildest imagining. That is the reality the disciples discovered. Life wasn't over for them. It was just beginning.

What is it you need the resurrected Christ to open for you, or in you? Jesus stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" . . . You are (now) witnesses of these things." Thanks be to God.