

*Not a Ghost*  
**Luke 24:36-53**  
John Breon

The two Emmaus disciples have returned to Jerusalem and told the other disciples about their experience. The risen Lord had appeared to them. He spoke to them as they walked along the road. They recognized him when he broke the bread and gave it to them. While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to all of them, "Peace be with you."

As we've seen before, when Jesus' people gather in his name, he is present and he speaks. The risen Lord is truly with us. And he wants to speak to us.

His presence is not always comforting. In spite of what they had heard about Jesus being alive, this group of disciples had not imagined what that might be like. When they see Jesus standing among them, they think he is a ghost. They're startled and frightened.

So he says to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do you doubt? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." And he showed them his hands and his feet. Then, in another demonstration of his reality, he ate some of the fish they had cooked.

As in John's gospel, the scars of Jesus are a witness to the disciples of the reality of Jesus. The disciples' fear and doubts give Jesus the opportunity to stress that he is really and physically alive. The disciples were not just having a vision or hallucination. They were not seeing a disembodied spirit. They were meeting a real person who could be seen and touched and who could eat—even in his glorious resurrection body.

If the risen Jesus is not a ghost, what is he? He is the one they have known and followed. He is the one who was crucified, dead and buried. He was dead. Now he is alive. His resurrection is more than the resuscitation or reanimation of a corpse. Not only is the risen Jesus not a ghost, he's not a vampire or a zombie or any other form of the "undead." He is alive in a new way. He didn't leave anything behind in the tomb and yet he is transformed

and glorified. He is able to appear and disappear at will, even inside locked rooms. At the same time, he is able to be seen and touched and he can eat.

The risen Jesus is real. His resurrection is real. He is our ever-living Savior, Teacher, Lord and Friend. The resurrection of Jesus shows that his incarnation is real. He became, and remains, truly and fully human. That affirms creation. Christian faith is not world-denying, but world-affirming. The same God whose Spirit dwells in us made our bodies and the world we live in. We don't see matter and physical reality, including our bodies, as evil or a prison to escape from. Instead, we see physical reality as part of God's good creation that is redeemed through the salvation Jesus brings. The physical reality of Jesus' resurrection shows that God is not out to make us into some kind of ghosts or phantoms, but into real and whole human beings—created in God's image and being restored into that image by Christ through the Holy Spirit. The spiritual, unseen, aspect of creation is real as well. In some ways, it may be more real than the physical. God intends to bring them together. He shows us what that looks like in Jesus' resurrection.

The reality of Jesus' resurrection affirms that his teaching is real and true. What he said in his teaching and preaching is vindicated and approved by God. The resurrection puts the stamp of authenticity on the words of Jesus. What he told us about God's kingdom and life in the kingdom is true.

The healing ministry of Jesus is real. The resurrection shows that the God of creation was at work in Jesus to make people whole, to restore creation to what God intended. Because he lives, he is still able to heal and restore.

The resurrection shows that Jesus' death and what it accomplished are real. Jesus died to save, and the resurrection demonstrates that he really is the Savior. Through his death, Jesus rescues us from sin and death and brings us back into right relationship with God.

The reality of Jesus' resurrection guarantees that our resurrection will be real. The New Testament says that Jesus is the "first fruits" of God's people who will be raised (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). Jesus is the first to be raised from the dead into this new kind of life. Everyone who is in Christ has

a share in that life and will be gloriously raised like him. The apostle Paul says it this way:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Philippians 3:20-21)

In the Apostles' Creed, we affirm that "on the third day he rose from the dead." We also affirm that we believe in "the resurrection of the body." Those are two events: the resurrection of Jesus in the past and the resurrection of believers in the future.

A man I knew in another church objected to that line about the resurrection of the body. As far as I know, he would not say that line when we recited the Creed. I was leading a class on the Apostles' Creed, and when we were studying that statement, he again said he didn't believe it. He stated that he believed in just some kind of spiritual existence and hinted that Jesus' resurrection was merely spiritual. I told him that I respectfully disagreed and read this passage from Luke to reinforce the physical, though transformed, nature of Jesus' resurrection. The man replied, "I don't want this body with its illness and pain." Several people in the class immediately said, "It will be healed and changed." I was grateful for them helping me make my point.

If we have this future resurrection and glorious life in God's new creation to look forward to, what does that mean for us now? In the resurrection of Jesus, the future has broken into the present age. Our hope in a resurrected life in the new creation assures us that our life in Christ is real. It reminds us that the Scriptures are true. Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the Scriptures in light of who he is.

Because the resurrection of Jesus is real, repentance and forgiveness are real. Jesus tells the disciples that repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name are offered to all people everywhere. Repentance is a change of mind and attitude and direction in life. Repentance is necessary because of sin and it's possible because of grace. Repentance is a gift from God. The

Holy Spirit makes possible our turning from sin back to God. We're not going to convince people to stop loving sin and start loving God all by ourselves. The Holy Spirit has to empower our witness and has to touch the people we bring the Good News to.

Forgiveness is release and cleansing from sin. God makes us not guilty. He pardons us and sets us free. That's what the cross of Jesus is all about. Without the cross and resurrection of Jesus, we are still in bondage to sin, we are left with the burden of our guilt. But in the cross we have freedom, cleansing, new beginnings and new life. We can declare a new reality: "In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven."

We've had squirrels in the church building this week. I think they are out and their entrances are all blocked now. It reminded me of an old story about a family who discovered a skunk in their basement. They finally decided the way to get it out was to leave a door open and leave a trail of food for it to follow out. The next day, they had two skunks in their basement! That's like when we try to get rid of sin by ourselves. It just keeps increasing. But Jesus is able to get the skunk out of the basement. He is able to take away our sins as he forgives us and sets us free.

The resurrection of Jesus means that we have a mission. We have a real mission in the real world. The world needs a real Savior. The world is looking for us to show them the real Jesus. If the death and resurrection of Jesus are just spiritual experiences, then we don't have to get involved in the messiness of life in the physical world. But because Jesus was really human and really died and really rose again, we are called to relationship with him in real life. And we are called to bring his life to others in the middle of their real need and suffering and loneliness and fear. The Holy Spirit is here to help us do that. We can't separate the power of the Holy Spirit from the crucified and risen Lord. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord who fills us with the life of Jesus.

In an article on youth ministry, Duffy Robbins uses the phrase "Get Real" to help us all see how God equips us for ministry and how God works through us as individuals.

**G**—Giftedness: What are some areas in which you feel God has gifted you?

**E**—Experiences: What are some of the experiences of your life that make you who you are?

**T**—Temperament: Are you quiet? Outgoing? Boisterous? Thoughtful? Easy-going?

**R**—Relationships: Do you have any relationships that already give you a bridge into kids' lives? Are you a parent, coach, or a mentor? Do you use a baby-sitter? [What other relationships do we have that are bridges into the lives of all kinds of people?]

**E**—Education: How can you use your educational background as an asset or a bridge into the lives of [others]?

**A**—Aptitude: What are you good at?

**L**—Likes/Loves: What are your hobbies? What are your passions?

*(Good News Magazine no date, p. 34)*

God wants to make us more fully ourselves, our real, true selves that he's created and redeemed and called us to be. God wants to use us in ministry as the real people we are in relation to him.

Jesus told the disciples to wait for what the Father promised, to wait until they would be clothed with power from on high. He was talking about the Holy Spirit. The disciples would receive the Spirit in fullness at Pentecost.

But we don't have to wait for the Holy Spirit to come. The Spirit has already come. We live in the age of the Spirit. The promise of the Father is real and is available now. The Holy Spirit is poured out now. Jesus said in Luke 11:13, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

I invite you to ask the Father for the gift of God's Holy Spirit. Will you repent and believe and ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit right now? Will you let God work through you to bring good news, repentance, forgiveness, new life to the people in your world? Will you allow the real

and living Lord to give you real life and work through you in witness and service to the real people around you?