

**Luke 24:35-49**

<sup>35</sup> Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. <sup>36</sup> While they were still speaking about this, he stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>37</sup> But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. <sup>38</sup> Then he said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup> Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." <sup>40</sup> And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. <sup>41</sup> While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed, he asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of baked fish; <sup>43</sup> he took it and ate it in front of them. <sup>44</sup> 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 and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled." <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. <sup>46</sup> And he said to them, "Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day <sup>47</sup> and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> And (behold) I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."



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**Context**

In Lectionary Cycle B, in which Mark is the primary gospel, the reading for the 2nd Sunday of Easter is taken from the Gospel of John and recounts the Upper Room scenes of Jesus' appearances and the story of Thomas. On this the 3rd Sunday of Easter, the lectionary again looks to another gospel account to tell the story of the appearance in the Upper Room. This pericope is taken from the Gospel of Luke.

In the Lucan recounting of the events of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, our story occurs on the evening of Easter Sunday. The women have found the tomb empty, there have been encounters with the Resurrected Jesus, and the news is spreading among the small group of faithful. But not all have heard – not the two disciples on the “Road to Emmaus” (24:17)

The first verse of our reading more traditionally belongs to the Emmaus road story when two disciples encounter the Risen Jesus (Lk 24:13-35). That reading is from the 2nd Sunday of Easter in Lectionary Cycle C. Let us pick up the ending of that story:

*<sup>30</sup> And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup> With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup> Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning (within us) while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” <sup>33</sup> So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them <sup>34</sup> who were saying, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” <sup>35</sup> Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

Brian Stoffregen provides good reason to review the “Road to Emmaus” account as he points out the parallels between the back-to-back Lucan accounts. Each in its own way is a story of the growth in faith as the disciples experience:

EMMAUS	JERUSALEM   Bethany
Jesus appears on the road disciples fail to recognize him Jesus scolds them for not believing Jesus instructs them from scripture Food is shared  disciples' eyes are opened Jesus disappears	Jesus appears in their midst disciples assume it is a ghost Jesus scolds them for doubting  Food is shared Jesus instructs them disciples' minds are opened Jesus ascends into heaven
MOVEMENT “blindness” to sight	MOVEMENT doubting to worship

Now the two have made the long trek back to Jerusalem, found the community gathered in the upper room, and shared their encounter. *While they were still speaking about this, [Jesus] stood in their midst.*”

One of the emphases of the “Road to Emmaus” account was to emphasize the reality of Jesus’ spiritual presence in the church in the Word proclaimed and in the “breaking of the bread.” Now Luke moves the emphasis to the physical reality of Jesus’ resurrection body. Jerome Kodell [Luke, 979] notes: “From the earliest times in the church, there was a danger of docetism, the heretical belief that Jesus was God behind a thin veneer of humanity: thus his suffering was only playacting, and his resurrection was simply a return to a completely spiritual existence with no bodily effect. The Letters of John combated this error (1 John 4:2–3; 2 John 7).” And so Luke stresses that Jesus’ resurrection body is real and not simply a resuscitated corpse. The disciples touch him; the marks of the passion are visible in his hands and feet; he eats with the disciples – far more than simply appearing among them.

It is good to remember that Luke’s primary audience are people raised in Hellenistic thought. The evangelist is offering a whole new category of thought, beyond any previous perspective.

## Commentary

The return of the two disciples from Emmaus returns the focus to Jerusalem which is the “center” of the Luke-Acts narrative. In the gospel all roads lead to Jerusalem. In *Acts* all roads lead from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Upon their return they find *the eleven and those with them*. The travelers are greeted with the news abuzz in the room: *The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!*”

As an aside, Luke recounts the tradition of Jesus’ appearance to Simon (the Apostle Peter’s original name) as does Mark, although neither record the appearance in either gospel. This also is in concert with an even older report from 1 Cor 15:4-5 “*that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Kephas [Simon], then to the Twelve.*” In all cases, the accounts preserve Peter’s role as leader of the Apostles. It is only after the travelers hear of the appearance to Peter do they have the chance to share their experience of the risen Jesus.

Jesus had predicted his passion and death – and that those predictions have come to pass is apparent to the small community of disciples sequestered away in the upper room, unsure of all that has passed, and even more unsure of what awaits them. But Jesus had also predicted his resurrection. We need to remember that the disciples have heard several accounts of the Resurrected Jesus: from women, Simon and others (cf. 34:22-27) and the disciples from the Emmaus road have returned to proclaim: “*The Lord is risen, indeed!*” (v.34). It is at this point that Jesus appears among them in the Upper Room. Their reaction is less than stellar: *But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost* (v.37).

Only in the later Lucan account of the Ascension (vv.50–53) do the Upper Room fear, amazement, and doubt (vv.37, 41) give way to worship, great joy, and obedience.

For the disciples it is a liminal moment. They are caught betwixt and between what they believed was possible and what is now being revealed. Even though Jesus had told them he would be raised from the dead, they were never quite sure what that meant and now they are face-to-face with the reality of the Resurrection.

Culpepper [484] offers that his passage can be understood as a story told in three parts:

- (1) proofs of the Resurrection (vv.36-43),
- (2) interpretation of the Scriptures and commissioning of the disciples (vv.44-49), and
- (3) the departure (Ascension) of Jesus (vv.50–53; with this last section just outside the boundaries of our Sunday gospel)

***Speaking about these things.*** It is a simple part of one verse: “*While they were still speaking about this..*” (v.36). Our Lectionary does well to include the previous verse – even though it is more properly part of the Emmaus road story: “*Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread*” (v.35). As Catholics we are often prone to focus only on the “*breaking of the bread*” and its Eucharistic implications. We should also consider “*what had taken place on the way.*” As Joel Green [853] remarks, “*this*” refers to “*evidences of the risen Lord, but more profoundly with the coherence between the pattern provided by Moses and all the prophets, the prophetic witness of the Scriptures to the Messiah who suffers and enters into his glory, the ministry of Jesus as this has been focused on table fellowship, and the experience of the resurrected Jesus.*”

***Fearing where angels tread.*** *While they were still speaking about this, he stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.”*<sup>37</sup> *But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost.*

The report that Jesus “stood” among them echoes the language of OT angelic appearances (Gen 18:2; 1 Chr 21:15–16; Dan 8:15; 12:5; Tob 5:4; cf. Num 22:22–24). Apparently they recognize the one before them as Jesus, but are not ready to accept that he could have any form other than an intangible one. It should not be surprising that the disciples are “startled and terrified.” They think they are seeing a *ghost* (v.37, 29). These are the only places where *pneuma* (spirit) is translated “ghost”.

Their terror (*emphobos*) is consistent with seeing an angel. That is the reaction of the women at the tomb at seeing the “two men in dazzling clothes” appearing before them (Luke 24:5) and the reaction of Cornelius at seeing a vision of an angel of God coming to him (*Acts 10:4*). When an angel appears to Zechariah, he is terrified (*tarasso*) (1:12), the same word Jesus uses of the disciples, “*Why are you troubled?*” (24:38). In contrast to the popular notion of a comforting guardian angel, the presence of these divine beings produced great terror and fear in those who saw them. Except for coming to Jesus in the garden (22:43), every other time angels (*aggelos*) appear, they say, “*Don't be afraid*” – to Zechariah (1:13); to Mary (1:30); and to the Shepherds (2:10).

**Offering Proof.** *Then he said to them, “Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.” And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.*

Jesus does not rebuke the disciples for their lack of faith but offers two proofs of his own materiality as evidence of his resurrected existence. We need to remember that resurrection is a new category for the disciples. It is likely that “raised from the dead” had been imagined as either a cadaver brought back to life or an “immortal soul” free from bodily existence. It is why Jesus assures them with the phrase *egō emini autos* – “it is I myself” – or in modern English, “It’s really me!”

*While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed* (v.41). The word used for “incredulous” is *apisteō* – lit. not trusting, not believing. The other instance of “not believing” (*apisteo*) in Luke occurs when the women tell the disciples about their experiences at the empty tomb. “*These words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe (apisteo) them*” (24:11). In the next verse, after Peter has been to the empty tomb, he goes home, “*amazed (thaumazo) at what had happened.*” Both the empty tomb and, so far, this appearance of Jesus produced only incredulity and amazement – two emotions that seem to get in the way of believing.

In other translations, we have text that is a little closer to the literal Greek: “While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering” (NRSV) – but perhaps more colloquially, “for it seemed too good to be true” (NEB).

Jesus' next offering of proof is presented with much fewer words and with no response from the disciples. Jesus eats in their presence. However, if we look back to the previous appearance in the story of Emmaus, we know that Jesus eating with the disciples opened up their eyes to see the truth about Jesus.

**Interpreting Scripture.** <sup>44</sup> *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 and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled.”* <sup>45</sup> *Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.* <sup>46</sup> *And he said to them, “Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day* <sup>47</sup> *and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.* <sup>48</sup> *You are witnesses of these things.* <sup>49</sup> *And (behold) I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”*

The second part of the appearance to the eleven and the others looks both backward and forward. Neither the text of the Emmaus Road story or this account provides any hints at the specific OT texts

Jesus points to: “*in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms...*” (v.46). As Jesus “*opened their minds*” this interlude serves both to bring closure to the disciples’ period of “fear” by recapping major themes of the Gospel and setting the stage for the coming of the Spirit and the work of the disciples as witnesses in the book of Acts. Verses 44–46 return to the theme of the necessity of Jesus’ death and the fulfillment of Scripture, while in vv. 47–49 Jesus commissions the disciples, promises their empowerment from on high, and outlines the mission that lies ahead. There are three parts of his instructions about what has been written.

- He is to suffer -- the messiah.
- He is to be raised from the dead on the third day.
- They are to be his witnesses, going in his name to proclaim repentance leading to the forgiveness of sins to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Green [857] writes:

“Which Scriptures portend messianic suffering and resurrection? One would be hard-pressed to locate specific texts that make these prognostications explicit. Even to attempt to do so would be wrongheaded, however. The point of Jesus’ words is not that such-and-such a verse has now come true, but that the truth to which all of the Scriptures point has now been realized! Even so, Luke does provide direct hints for the scriptural basis of the reversal Jesus has experienced in his life, death, and resurrection, by drawing above all on the psalms and Isaiah in his presentation of Jesus’ passion. Similarly, the proclamation of repentance for forgiveness of sins to all nations is scripturally based, with the Lukan narrative suggesting in this respect the pivotal importance of Isa 49:6. Simeon borrows from this text in Luke 2:32, Paul cites it in Acts 13:47, and it is echoed again in Acts 1:8 (cf. Acts 26:23; 28:28). This scriptural background manifestly portends the mission to all peoples.”

***In His Name.*** “...*repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*”<sup>48</sup> *You are witnesses of these things.*”<sup>49</sup> *And (behold) I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.*”

Since these disciples are to continue Jesus’ ministry, perhaps it is not surprising that they are to proclaim the salvific message “*in his name.*” In fact, what is done in the “*name*” of Jesus surfaces as an important motif in Acts. Luke will portray a community very much oriented around Jesus (1:1, 21–22)—with salvation offered to “*everyone who calls on the name of the Lord*” (= Jesus; cf. 2:21, 36), and people directed to be baptized “*in the name of Jesus Christ*” (2:38), appropriating the blessings available through and signaling their allegiance to him. Subsequently in Acts Christians heal (3:6, 16; 4:10, 30; 19:13), preach (4:12; 5:28, 40), and are baptized (8:16; 10:48; 19:5) in the name of Jesus; suffer for his name (5:41; 9:16; 21:13); and are those “*who call upon the name*” of Jesus (9:14, 21; 22:16). The mission role of the disciples is summarized in the words, “*You are witnesses of these things.*”

Jesus’ last statement to the disciples is an assurance that he will send “*the promise of my Father*” upon them and that they will be “*clothed with power from on high*” (v. 49). The assurance is notable for its ambiguity; it does not explicitly refer to the Holy Spirit. This part of the commission to the disciples will be repeated almost verbatim in Acts 1:4, but there it is followed by a clarifying comment: “*you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 1:5).

The language of sending recurs frequently in Luke, almost in a Johannine sense. Jesus himself was sent by the Father and, in turn Jesus sent the disciples during the public ministry and now in mission post-Resurrection. Now he promises to send what the Father promised. There is no previous reference to “*the promise of the Father*” in Luke, but various references to the Spirit, especially at the beginning



of the Gospel (cf. 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25–26; 3:16, 22; 4:1; 10:21). The closest antecedent to Jesus' assurance in v. 49 is the earlier assurance, "*How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.*" (11:13).

Green notes that the metaphor of being clothed was used in early baptismal contexts (Gal 3:27; cf. 1 Cor 15:53–54; Eph 4:24; 6:11, 14; Col 3:10–12). "Power" (*dynamis*) has attended Jesus' work throughout the Gospel (1:35; 4:14, 36; 5:17; 6:19; 8:46; 19:37). The Son of Man will be seated "*at the right hand of the power of God*" (22:69) and come again with power and glory (21:27), but now the risen Lord promises to confer that power on the disciples (cf. 9:1). The conferring of the Spirit from on high will also fulfill the Scriptures (see Isa 32:15; Joel 2:28). There will be plenty of work for the disciples to do, but for now their instructions are to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the fulfillment of the Lord's promises.

### **A Final Reflection**

This coming Sunday is the 3rd Sunday of Easter where Jesus appears to the disciples in the Upper Room on the evening of Easter Sunday. The disciples *were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost* Only the risen Christ Himself was able to conquer the fear, bewilderment and doubt of his disciples and to prepare them to enter the world as witnesses of the good news. Their witness to the public ministry of Jesus - his miracles, teaching, and divine power - are many. Their witness to the Resurrection consists of simple testimony: he saw him die, we buried him, he appeared to us - we touched him and he ate fish with us - and he ascended into the heavens. The witness relies on the witness and experience of the apostles and disciples.

The Resurrection is not something that can be subjected to empirical proof and verification. The foundation of the faith rests upon the experience of individuals and the community of believers. As one commentator noted, while we can no longer touch the hands or feet of Jesus, the ministry of the hands and feet of countless believers across the ages testified to the Lord's living presence among the community. We may not be able to eat fish with Jesus, although his presence is there among the Lenten Friday fish fries, the soup kitchens, around the family dinner table, and gathered at the altar to celebrate the Eucharist. In this witness, Christ is present and the work of the Kingdom continues.

Even today it is only the risen Savior Himself who can banish all fear from our hearts, and give us the inward rest and peace to enable us to be living witnesses of Jesus. And all the spiritual equipment that we need, He gives us through the Spirit, already given to his church on that first Pentecost and to every believer in the sacraments and in prayer. We possess the divine strength for the task to which we have been called.

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