

Sermon  
Easter 3-B  
April 18, 2021  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
William Bradbury

Acts 3:12-19  
1 John 3:1-7  
Luke 24:36b-48  
Psalm 4

**Do you believe in ghosts? Have you ever seen a ghost?**

C. S. Lewis wrote that the only person he knows to have ever seen a ghost does not believe in ghosts. **"She says what she saw must have been an illusion or a trick of the nerves. And obviously she may be right. Seeing is not believing."**

I've never seen a ghost and I'm a bit agnostic as to their existence. I can tell you for sure, however, that I have no desire whatsoever to spend a night in a house that is believed to be haunted!

**The thing about ghosts in our popular understanding is that they are mostly dead.**

In 1 Samuel 28, desperate King Saul goes to the witch of Endor to have her conjure up the ghost of the Prophet Samuel, though he had outlawed this practice, to find out what's coming next in his battle against David. The ghost of Samuel in no interesting sense is alive, except he does tell Saul, "Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me" in this place of death.

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The disciples in the upper room on Easter night, however, have a very different experience. When the Risen Jesus first appears, they can only see him as the ghost of a man whose death was seared into their souls. They are terrified, which is why the Risen Jesus keeps saying "peace be with you", meaning, "take a few deep breaths, folks, and calm down".

Yes, the disciples belong to that group of faithful Jews, like the pharisees, who believe at the end of the age there would be a general resurrection of the faithful into God's new creation, but clearly the new creation hasn't arrived, because those in charge are still killing righteous people like Jesus.

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 But slowly three things dawn on the disciples: **the first realization** is Jesus's physicality: he is a substantial living man, not an insubstantial dead one. To prove this point Jesus eats a piece of broiled fish.

I heard of an Anglican priest who came to faith when he read this passage about the broiled fish—that simple act changed his view of the resurrection from being a religious idea, a myth, a theological concept, an illusion to being an embodied man full of the life of God.

**The second realization** is that this man in front of them is the same Jesus who was crucified, because he has the marks of the crucifixion on his body. Cross and resurrection are not two different events separated by a weekend, **but two sides of one event.**

**The third realization** is that the Risen Jesus is **MORE alive** than they are, for he is now in the New Creation with a glorified body that will never die.

They realize the New Creation is showing up in stages, with Jesus the first to enter New Creation and with us to follow.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:

**"... in fact Christ is the first fruits of those who have died."**

As these realizations, the disciples are slowly pulled from disbelief into joy. **It can't be Jesus, but by God it is Jesus** and back and forth their minds go. But then it becomes clear to them that **this encounter is not with a dead man but with the living Christ.**

And as time passes, their conventional minds are further cracked opened to a new consciousness of resurrection and New Creation, so much so that they become capable, through the Holy Spirit, of living inside this reality, inside God, and thus changing the world.

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 You and I were not in that upper room that fateful night, but we have been baptized into that experience. As Paul writes in Romans 6:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, **just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.**

<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, **we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.**

IN just a moment as little Austen Hoegen enters this experience we will have the opportunity to renew our own baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ.

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 And as we pay attention, we will notice there are a lot of people who live out of this experience: A few years ago Anglican bishop and New Testament scholar, Tom Wright had a small, yet powerful, encounter in a taxi in London during rush hour.

He was in his bishop's outfit so the cabbie commented on the difficult time the Anglican Church was having with the issue of whether to allow women to become bishops. Bishop Wright agreed they were indeed having a difficult time. **Then the taxi driver turned around to face him—the traffic was stopped—and said, "What I always say is this: if God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, everything else is basically rock 'n' roll, i'n'it?"**

Bishop Wright says, "It was a great gospel moment, and I have dined out on it ever since."

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**The ghosts in our lives, those things we regret and can't let go of, haunt us and rob us of life.**

**The Risen Christ breaks into our locked rooms, to forgive us and to pull us more deeply into God's Realm.**

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 Yet, every morning as we climb out of sleep, we must reclaim this faith, opening our hearts and minds to his Risen Life. Any simple, heart-felt prayer will do—like "I thank you Jesus that you hold me and my world"—empowers us to turn from the backward pull of our ghosts, and **to step out into a new day filled with the Life and Love of the Risen Christ.**