

An Appearance
Luke 24:36b-48
Colebrook Congregational Church
Third Sunday of Easter

This week's selection is a similar story as last week's selection of Doubting Thomas, but with a different purpose and intention on the part of the writers. While John's version was to give comfort that Jesus would assuage all doubts, though it would be better to have faith in Jesus; Luke's version seems more to be an assertion about the nature of Christ, which was being argued over amongst the earliest Christians.

Chapter 24 is the last chapter of Luke, starting with the Resurrection of Jesus. While John described the open tomb being found by Mary Magdalene and verified by Peter and the Beloved Disciple, Luke tells of a considerable group of women who are confronted by two dazzling persons who said that Jesus was among the living, followed by Peter's verification at the tomb, then Jesus appeared to Cleopas and another disciple on the road to Emmaus, but they did not recognize Him until they broke bread together. Those believers then rushed off to find the eleven Disciples.

Our selection starts in the middle of the action, with the two disciples from the road speaking of their encounter with Jesus, then Jesus just walks on in and presents himself to the others. The earlier appearance on the Road to Emmaus is considered to be a spiritual appearance of Jesus, but Luke wanted to make sure we knew about the physical appearance of Jesus as well, and that is reason for this part.

The Disciples at first suppose that they are seeing a spirit or a ghost. It would be easy for an outsider to claim that the Disciples are just hallucinating or seeing ghosts. Instead of dealing with the doubt of one Disciple as He did with Thomas, here Jesus is addressing all of them. He showed them his scars and insisted that they touch them, to prove that He wasn't a ghost, but that He had physically resurrected. Then He went further and sat down and ate some fish with them.

So, here is the issue that Luke is addressing. To make Christianity and Jesus more understandable to the pagan Greeks and Romans, there was some

theological arguments, one of which we see Paul engaged in in the Book of Acts. To make Jesus more understandable to pagans, a type of Christianity developed very early on called Docetism. It was rejected as a heresy by the first ecumenical council, the one that created the Nicene Creed and is accepted by nearly every single Christian denomination.

There are a few types of Docetism, but they are narrowly defined by believing that Jesus was not human, only divine or spiritual in nature, lacking any physical form or reality. Different kinds of Docetists believed: Christ was so divine, he could not have been human at all, and because there was no physical nature, then he could not have suffered on the cross; or Jesus only appeared to be physical, but was really a phantasm; or that Jesus and Christ were two different entities, with Christ entering Jesus at his baptism, then abandoning him on the cross.

Here's the problem with Docetism. If Jesus was not physically human as well as divine, then the sacrifice of Jesus as a scapegoat for our sins is rendered meaningless and the Resurrection is no longer the miracle that proved Jesus spoke truly. So too with Communion, which Jesus instituted with the words, "this is my body, broken for you."

While each of the four Gospels tells us the same story, they do so in different ways, and it is in those details that we can learn about the situations, community, and issues that were of those days. Here in Luke, and also in John with Doubting Thomas, they could have just had one appearance, and did what Mark does, say that many more things like this happened that are not written about in this book, but they didn't. They wanted to make sure that everyone knew that Jesus has a corporeal form, that He was physically there, that He physically resurrected, that He was also human...just like us. Luke did this by describing how Jesus not only showed His wounds, things a phantasm wouldn't have, but also insisted that the Disciples touch them, proving their reality.

Docetism was so abhorrent to early Christians, that they rejected it in whatever form it showed itself as, and it hasn't been a concern now for over a thousand years.

After proving His physical reality, Jesus then gave the disciples their final lesson. He reminded them that everything must be fulfilled, that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and then rise from the dead. He opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and charged them to go out proclaiming the Good News to all the world, and that they are witnesses to this.

Back at the beginning of His visit, before Jesus appeared and proved His Resurrection, the Disciples and their followers of Jesus were gathered together, considering what they were going through. They were not at peace, as Jesus greeted them. They had been following this man who preached love for neighbors and the forgiveness of sins. He proclaimed the coming Kingdom of God, filled with peace and reconciliation. They had seen him perform amazing miracles in the name of God, proving what He taught was true. They had expected to be working towards making this happen. But instead, their leader was arrested and crucified, and now they huddled in a secluded room.

At the very least, they would have been very confused by this turn of events. Jesus had foretold His death, but the Disciples always misunderstood Him, or they did not want to believe that He would leave them. They were probably also disappointed. He really left them. They were now rudderless, all the work that were ready to do no longer mattered, they were left out in the cold, alone. Then three days later, Jesus returned, and then He equipped them to go and do the work that they had prepared for. And then Jesus commissioned them, sending them out to preach and teach and forgive, accomplishing the divine work.

The very first steampunk convention I attended was called the Steampunk Industrial Revolution. It was an amazing experience for me, I met a lot of amazing artists and learned many things from them. And to top it off, one of my artistic creations won second place in the show. This event has held a special place in my heart, and marks the annual beginning of steampunk artistic events in New England for the year. At the close of the last event in October, it is a race for Theresa and I and many others to make new creations

and have them ready to debut in March for this one. And these competitions are not confrontational, but collegial. We support and assist and challenge each to push ourselves to do & make amazing works of art

A couple years ago, there was some chaos among the event staff over one of the regular guest speakers. He had caused a ruckus at a different event run by a different organization the month before and some staff wanted that person banned. The other side said he hadn't done anything wrong at any of their events, so they saw no reason to do so. The arguments did not stay behind their closed doors, becoming very public and disruptive to the order of things. The parent organization looked at the chaos, and with only a few weeks before the event, decided it didn't need this sort of headache, so they canceled the event.

Many of my friends and I were at a loss. We had been working so hard on our pieces and now it seemed like it we had wasted our time. We didn't know what to do. Many of us gathered at our monthly social and commiserated with each other over the loss of something dear to us. Many of us were also event planners. We discussed trying to do something to fill the gap, each of us suggested a one-day thing that would have been a poor imitation of the original. Then someone new arrived, who was from a different company and offered to pick up the pieces, to do the same exact event as the other company had planned, with all the same components and same time as the original, and thus give us the outlet and direction we sought. And she succeeded.

Like those Disciples long ago, we too had gathered together in seclusion for mutual support in our confusion and disappointment. We too did not have the faith that we should have had, because in the end, the solution and direction appeared to guide us.

We should remember, that in the face of disappointments in life, to not give up. We must keep faith that God is with us, and will help us get through the rough times and see us safely through. Do not just stay in a locked room, but be on the lookout for when God holds the door open.

Prayers of the People

[PAUSE]

Holy God, you have called us to follow in the way of your risen Son, and to care for those who are our companions, not only with words of comfort, but with acts of love. Seeking to be true friends of all, we offer our prayers on behalf of the church and the world. We offer the prayers of our hearts, spoken aloud, or held silently within us. We pray for all who need you, need your light, and your guidance, be they known to us or not. We pray for all who are unwell, we pray for their comfort in the form they need. We pray for the lost, that they be found. We pray for our caregivers, we pray that you guide their hands and hearts. We pray for our caretakers and defenders who stand between us and danger, that you keep them safe from harm as risk themselves for us. We pray for ourselves, that we be faithful servants for you. We especially pray for:

Prayers of the People, concluding with:

Guide us in the path of discipleship, so that, as you have blessed us, we may be a blessing for others, bringing the promise of the kingdom near by our words and deeds. Amen.

Luke 24:36b-48

24:36b While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

24:37 They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

24:38 He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

24:39 Look 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."

24:40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

24:41 While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

24:42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish,

24:43 and he took it and ate in their presence.

24:44 Then 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."

24:45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,

24:46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,

24:47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

24:48 You are witnesses of these things.