



“Ham, Eggs, and Easter”

Scripture – Luke 24:36-48

Sermon preached by the Rev. Randall T. Clayton, D.Min., MSW

Sunday, April 14, 2024

In recent weeks, some of us have felt our houses shake from an earthquake centered in New Jersey, and some of us donned eclipse glasses and looked upward, marveling at the grandeur of the skies when the moon blocked the sun. Thinking about these two events I find myself wondering what it would have been like for our ancient ancestors to experience such things without knowledge of what they were. Did they think the world was about to end when the earth moved under their feet? Did they fear that the sun had given up when suddenly in the middle of the day its light was blotted out? And then when the earth stopped shaking, and the sun’s rays returned, did they suddenly feel a sense of exhilaration, of joy, that calamity had not befallen them?

But while I suspect there might have been a sense of terror among people long ago when it got dark at mid-afternoon and the sun seemed to refuse to shine, I have no doubt that encountering a resurrected Jesus on some level was a frightening and frightful thing, at least at first, and that such an encounter would have given rise to no small measure of disbelief and doubt. I mean, as it’s been said, there are only two things that are certainties in our world: death and taxes. And, if you can’t count on dead staying dead, then all bets are off.

Last Sunday, Greg shared with us the story of the resurrected Jesus’ appearance to his disciples as it is recorded in John’s Gospel. Today we turn to Luke’s account of Easter evening. Hear now the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 24, verses 36 to 48.

Luke 24:36-48

³⁶While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’³⁷They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, ‘Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Look 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.’⁴⁰And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.⁴¹While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish,⁴³and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴Then 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.’ ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah^{*} is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses^{*} of these things. ⁱ Amen.

Eggs, both for hunting and for deviling, ham, lilies, and the *Hallelujah Chorus* are all things that are often associated with Easter day, all helping to make that day one of celebration and joy, as it should be. But while we sing of earth and heaven never more being the same and of telling the “grim, demonic chorus, Christ is risen! Get you gone,” ⁱⁱ then Monday comes, and Tuesday, and Wednesday, and Thursday...and for most of us, at some point, life gets back to normal again as the daily routine of life returns. And so, it has. By now the eggs are finished, the ham has been consumed, the lilies faded, and the scores of the *Hallelujah Chorus* get put back up on the shelves in the music library to gather dust for another year. But is Easter really over?

For those who were closest to Jesus, on Friday before that special Sunday, with Jesus’ execution, their world came crashing down. Their joy was extinguished as were their hopes. Once again, the good guys finished last. Once again, the empire had been triumphant.

According to Luke’s account, early on Sunday morning, women came to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body, but found it vacant. As they were processing this unexpected turn of events, likely figuring that Jesus’ body had been stolen (after all, the dead do stay dead, that you can count on) suddenly they were greeted by angels who asked them why they were looking for the living among the dead and who told them that Jesus was alive again. When the women told the disciples what they had encountered at the tomb, the disciples thought it was just an idle tale, something the women made up. But to his credit, Peter ran to the tomb anyway, looked in, saw the now discarded burial clothes lying on the ground and went home amazed.

A little later that day, two of the disciples were going to the village of Emmaus. As they were walking away from Jerusalem, they talked about what had happened to Jesus. A good man... Arrested. Killed. Dead. Oh, the tragedy of it all, the heartbreak, and terror, too.

While they were walking and talking, a stranger joined them on the road who pointed out to them that it was the prophets who had declared that the Messiah would suffer and enter into glory. This stranger continued to interpret scripture to them as they walked together that afternoon. Toward the end of the day, the two disciples asked their companion to join them – to stay with them for night was falling. Yes, they urged the stranger to stay, and Jesus did stay.

That evening, the stranger and the two disciples shared a meal together, during which the stranger took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. In this shared meal the eyes of the two disciples were opened, and suddenly they realized that the stranger was none other than Jesus, who was inexplicably now alive again. But Jesus then vanished.

These two disciples turned around, returned to Jerusalem that night, found the other disciples and their companions, and told them what they had experienced. As they were sharing, suddenly Jesus stood

among the group. He said to them, “Peace be with you,” offering a greeting was more than a “hi” because in those days the wish for “peace” it included a wish for communal wellbeing and salvation.ⁱⁱⁱ Those in the room were terrified at seeing Jesus standing there, and who can blame them? They knew for certain Jesus was dead, and they knew with certainty that the dead stay dead. The only explanation they could figure at that moment was either that they were encountering a ghost or they were having some sort of group hallucination. Jesus then told them to look at his hands and feet, inviting them to touch him and see that he wasn’t a ghost. Then while the disciples were joyously disbelieving, Jesus asked them for something to eat. The disciples gave Jesus a piece of broiled fish, which he consumed in front of them.

Now ghosts don’t have real, touchable bodies, nor do they consume a meal. And hallucinations have no need of broiled fish. So that night in that location Jesus was visibly demonstrating that he wasn’t a ghost. He wasn’t a figment of their imagination. He wasn’t just an “idea” or some sort of “spiritual” being. He was alive – flesh and blood, bones, and skin. Alive. And that evening the resurrected Jesus opened their eyes and minds to the scriptures, telling them that they were to be witnesses.

So ended Easter day in Luke’s account. But was Easter over?

A number of years ago, on the day after Easter, I went south to visit my family. When I got off the plane in Greenville, South Carolina, I rented a car and began a drive that would take me through very rural parts of western South Carolina and northeastern Georgia. As I was making this Easter Monday drive past kudzu covered trees, blooming spring flowers, plenty of Georgia red clay, pine trees, and chicken houses, I had the car’s radio turned on. Somewhere between the little community called Gum Log, Georgia, and a tiny town named Eastonali, a commentator on the radio station said something like, “It’s Easter Monday, and the ham is all gone, the deviled eggs have been eaten, and we’ve hung up our bonnets. Easter,” she said, “is now over.”

Easter over? Really?

One theologian noted, “A trip to an empty tomb confines Easter to very early morning on the first day of the week when the women anoint Jesus’ body. We know when, [and] where, ...the resurrection happened, [and] We know when Easter is over...” But then as he reflects on Jesus eating broiled fish, he goes on to say, “Celebrating Easter by eating means that Jesus could show up, that resurrection could happen, at any table, at every table. [Thus], we have no way of knowing when, where and how the risen Christ will bring new life. Rather than being confined to one day or to 50, Jesus’ Easter feast continues as one meal leads to another, and the table gets larger and larger, and closer and closer together.”^{iv}

Several years ago, now, this Presbytery undertook a pilot project – the Unglued Church, I believe it was called. With the help of some outside consultants and using a very specific process, the churches who participated went through a series of activities and deliberate conversations about their future directions. Part of the Unglued process was for members of the church to take a walk around the community in which they were located. The walk wasn’t so much to try to discern where there was desperate need that could be filled, but rather to try to see where God was already working in that community, what God was already up to in that neighborhood. And then the task was to discern how that congregation could join that resurrection work already in process. Easter, you see, is not over. Jesus still stays with us, inviting us to join in the resurrection work which our Risen Lord is already doing in the world.

Wherever we see a sign of hope in the midst of despair, there the Risen Lord is, because we live in Easter. Wherever we catch a glimpse of joy in the midst of the routine, there the Risen Lord is. Easter continues. Whenever a Palestinian child is able to access medical care, the Risen Lord is there and so is Easter hope. Whenever a person with severe mental illness gets the treatment they need, the Risen Lord is there too, because Easter continues. Whenever those who are not housed get a roof over their heads and furniture for their homes, you know that Easter continues, and that resurrection power and love have visited. Whenever a household in Guatemala gets a fuel-efficient stove, there Jesus' easter meal continues.

You see, Easter doesn't just belong back there in the century of Jesus' crucifixion. And it isn't just one day out of 365 in our time. It continues, today and forever. So, if we pay attention, perhaps we might encounter the resurrected Jesus and experience Easter anew in that little community of Gum Log, Georgia, or Landenberg, Pennsylvania, or Hockessin, Delaware, or Wilmington's West Center City or Trolley Square, too...and perhaps we meet the risen Lord here in this sanctuary or downstairs in Walton Hall, too. When we do, we are invited to join Jesus in the work Jesus is already doing in our world, our community, and our churches, too. Yes, the ham is gone. So are the Easter eggs. The last strains of the *Hallelujah Chorus* have died out, but the resurrected Jesus stays with us. Truly his reign will know no end and the "flowers of paradise" that he offers, "will never fail throughout eternity."^v Easter is now. Easter is forever.

ⁱ New Revised Standard Version.

ⁱⁱ Brian Wren, past of text of "Christ Is Risen! Shout Hosanna!" Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal, Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Jordan Brown, *workingpreacher.org* April 14, 2024

^{iv} Craig Satterlee, Christian Century, page 21, April 18, 2006).

^v Matthew Bridges, 1851. Part of verse 4 of "Crown Him with Many Crowns", Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal, Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.

Prayers of the People ~ Gregory Knox Jones

Ever present God, who hears our sighs, feels our sadness, and knows our inward thoughts better than we know them ourselves, we share with you this day our burdens, our frustrations, and our weariness.

There are times when we reflect on our world and our personal lives, and our soul feels barren: Our dreams have dried up and long since forgotten.

We have relationships on life support because of critical comments.

Our career has become lifeless due to a crushing workload or not enough work; hopes have petrified because of the violence, the greed, the abuse of the planet, and the disregard for people in poverty.

Everlasting God, when our vision is narrow and our spirit is empty, we feel pity for ourselves and revel in our sorrows. We ponder the present and imagine this is the way it will always be. We obsess on our troubles and imagine there will be nothing new, nothing fresh, nothing promising. The same old, same old, will chip away at our soul.

Mighty God, we pray that you will breathe your spirit into us and revive us. May your peace that passes all understanding allay our anxieties, bolster our backbone, and heighten our hopes.

Help us never to forget that you are a God of resurrection who guides us around obstacles and past dead ends, who wipes away tears and chuckles at death, who inspires us to dream and dares us to be adventuresome.

Living Lord, remind us that you are not finished with us, and you are not finished with your world. Infuse us with the determination to plow ahead and to never cease hoping for a better day; and may each of us commit to *working* for a better world so that we back our words with action when we pray for Your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray in the name of the resurrected one who taught us to pray together, saying, Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.