



Luke 24:1-12

“Too Good Not To Be True!”
(18th in a series on Luke’s Gospel)

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(Easter, Resurrection of the Lord)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill
Main Street UMC
211 North Main St.
Greenwood, SC 29646

Church Office: 864-229-7551
Church Website with sermon manuscripts: www.msumc1.org
Email: PThrailkil@aol.com

“Serving Christ from City Center”

"LUKE 23:54-56, 24:1-12 "TOO GOOD NOT TO BE TRUE"

Trauma + New Contrary Information = Hard To Process

Luke 23:54-56 The Women From Galilee Who "Saw The Tomb": Issue Of Continuity.

54	a	It was the day of Preparation, and the <u>sabbath</u> was beginning.	Late Friday, 3 Actions: Follow, Saw Tomb, Body
55	b	The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid;	
56	b'	then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.	Public Rituals, Presumes Death Is Permanent
	a'	On <u>the sabbath</u> they rested according to the commandment.	Faithful, Pious Jews (1:6, 2:22, 23, 27, 39)

Luke Abbreviates Mark's Account, Matthew Adds

1) vv.1-4a JOURNEY TO THE TOMB TO COMPLETE THE BURIAL RITES.

			Empty Tomb, //Mt. 28:1-10, Mk. 16:1-8, Jn. 20:1-18
1		But on the first day of the week, at early dawn,	Time: Early Sunday
		they (i.e the women) went to the tomb,	They Had Seen The Place Of Burial, Lk. 23:54-56 Above
		taking the spices which they had prepared.	Spices: Odor Problem/ Grieving/ Hasty Burial Remedied
2		And they <i>found</i> the stone rolled away from the tomb,	1st Odd Sign: Stone Moved, But Who?
3		but when they went in they <i>did not find</i> the body of the Lord Jesus.	23:49, 55, 24:23, 2nd Odd Sign: Grave Robbing?
4		While they were perplexed about this,	Question Raised, Gk. <i>Aporeo</i> = Mental Confusion
			Empty Tomb Alone Does Not Lead To Faith, Significance Must Be Explained

2) vv.4b-5 THE ANGELS ASK AND ANSWER A QUESTION.

			"Men" = Euphemism
			2 Macc. 3:26, Angels Suddenly Appear As Agents Of Divine Revelation
5		behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel;	2:9, 21:34, Witnesses Appear (Dt. 19:15)
		and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground,	Response: Prostration/ Worship
		the men said to them,	No One Saw Resurrection, Daniel 7:28, 10:9, 15
Rebuke 1		"Why do you seek the living/ among the dead?//	Is. 8:19, Variant, Funny Question: Mild Rebuke, 20:38
6a		He is not here/ but is risen."	a-b-b'-a', Cross Not End! Implicit Announcement; Devout, But Misguided
			Chain = Suffering, Death, Tomb; Now Empty Tomb, Angels' Word, Jesus' Word, Witness!

2') vv.6b-7 THE ANGELS ISSUE A REMINDER. (L Only).

Rebuke 2			Reminder Of Prophecy Now Fulfilled
6b		Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee,	24:44, There From The Start! 22:19
7	a	that the Son of man <i>must be</i> delivered into the hands of <i>sinful</i> men,	Divine Design/Plan To Expose Sin
	b	and be crucified,	Rejection By Men, Suffering/ Morally Evil Act
	c	and on the third day rise."	1 Cor. 15:4, Transformed Physicality, Vindicated By God: Keeps Promises
			Passion Predictions, 9:22, 44; 13:3, 17:25, 18:32-33, 22:37, 24:7 (Jerusalem)

1') vv.8-12 JOURNEY FROM THE TOMB TO DECLARE THE ANGELIC MESSAGE.

			Spontaneous Witness Springs From Authentic Understanding
8	a	And they remembered his words,	They Believe The Angelic Preaching = Faith, 22:61
9		and returning from the tomb	Rupture In Circle, Judas Now Gone, 24:33, Acts 1:26
	b	they told <i>all this</i> to "the eleven" and to all the rest.	Official Leaders + Others, 2:20, Acts 1:14
			First-hand, Multiple, Credible Service (8:2-3, 23:49)
10	b'	Now it was Mary Magdalene and Jo-anna and Mary the mother of James	//Luke 8:1-3. 23:49, 55
		and the other women with them who told this to the apostles (<i>sent out ones</i>);	Provide Continuity, Acts 1:2
11	a'	but <u>these words</u> seemed to them an idle tale,	Embarrassing! Testimony Is Febrile Nonsense, Condescending
		and they did not believe them.	Josephus Ant. 4.8.15, See Thomas, John 20:24, Luke 9:45
			Problem Of Disbelief Is Among The Men, Buttresses Testimony Of Women
12	a	But Peter rose and ran to the tomb,	Jn. 20:3-10, Verification, Second Witness To Empty Tomb (Num. 35:30, Dt. 17:6ff)
	b	and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves;	Confirms Report, No Grave Robbing! Corporeal
	a'	and he went home wondering (marveling) at what had happened.	24:24 Echo, Gk. <i>Thaumazo</i> = Marvel
			Not Yet Belief, First Steps Of Faith, More To Come, No New Message

Analysis: 1) Victor Over Death: Resurrection, 2) Removal From Earth: Ascension, 3) Cosmic Lord: Exaltation; Jesus As Our Model/Future

Luke 24:1-12 is a prelude to appearance stories (Lk. 24:13-35, 36-52, Acts 1:1-11). The resurrection was not created by the church (wish fulfillment); rather the church was created by the resurrection (an event of God's doing). No one would have *made up* a story with women as the first witnesses. Divine revelation through angels explains the empty tomb; subsequent encounters with the Lord verify the angelic preaching. Words such as "perplexed" and "wondering" demonstrate the shock and surprise of the events. Jesus must overcome a healthy dose of skepticism among his followers, then and now! Peter checks things out for himself. The Lord is playing hide-and-seek and drawing them along with new evidence! God keeps his promises, to Jesus and to us. Women are welcomed as full credible participants in the community of Jesus. We must be patient with one another because not all have the same evidence. Resurrection and reincarnation are true alternatives and cannot be harmonized with one another. We are not Hindus. We live only one life, then face God!

A Brief Treatment Of Luke 24:1-12

Luke 24:1-12 is not a resurrection appearance but a resurrection report, first from the angels to the women, then from the women to the apostles. The first mission is within the circle of Jesus' followers. The verification of Jesus' appearances awaits the Emmaus trek (24:13-35) and group appearances (24:36-52). The evidence unfolds in layers under divine providence. First the empty tomb, then the divine revelation of angels, then a call to remember Jesus' prophetic words, then the discovery of the linens by Peter which rules out theft, then a series of encounters with the risen Lord. An empty tomb and an appearing Lord lead to the conclusion: *God has indeed raised Jesus from the dead*. His work- after a pause- begins anew.

The thought unit is a 4:2 concentric pattern (1-2-2'-1'). The three phrases "the women went to the tomb," "when they went in," "perplexed" in vv.1-4a are echoed in "returning from the tomb," "looking in," "wondering" in vv.8-12 and serve as a bracket to mark off the unit. The frames (1//1') covers travel back and forth to the tomb by the women and Peter; the central verses (2//2') recount two angelic rebukes to the women. Divine revelation intrudes with news of God's surprising work; Jesus is vindicated. God has pronounced a *Yes* over the whole of his life after the world's rejecting *No*. Guess who wins?

Verses 1-4a depend on the report of 23:54-56 where the women observe the tomb and enter to see how the body is laid. Aware the hasty burial did not include spices to keep down the odors of decomposition for later grieving at the site (an expected custom), they remedy the lack and rest on the Sabbath. Early Sunday morning they find an open tomb and an absent body. In Luke's parallel phrases *they find the tomb open but they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus*. The likely inference is grave-robbing. They are *perplexed*. Mental confusion reigns as they stand at the edge of history's greatest news. His resurrection as a single individual is not considered since for Jews this occurs only at the end of the age in a general resurrection. The future has come into the present in Jesus singular resurrection!

Suddenly- as indicted by *behold*- two angels appear in the darkness. Shining raiment indicates angelic status. Reactions of fear and reverence are standard parts of an angelophany. The other world, the invisible world, intrudes with something seen and now heard. The angels speak in unison using a smart-alec question, "Why do you seek the living (a) among the dead (b)?" The question is answered in reverse order, "He is not here (b') *among the dead*, but is risen (a') *among the living*." The body is gone because of transformation. This announcement is supplemented in 2' (vv.6b-7) by the sharp reminder that Jesus earlier addressed the issue (9:22, 18:32-33), the implication being they should have listened- along with the men- and so not be surprised by the empty tomb. Jesus' prophecies come true, so why not this one?

The final paragraph (1' vv.8-12) is complex. The women get it! They believe because of the two-part angelic preaching. Jesus has been raised, and it should not have come as a surprise. They then become, in one of my favorite phrases, *epistles to the apostles* and tell them *all this*. The witnesses are multiple, unified, and- because of their history- credible. But they and their report are dismissed as female nonsense. The women believe the angels; the men do not believe the women. Male unbelief! To his credit, Peter is curious and runs to the tomb for personal verification where he finds the tomb empty of the body but with burial linens present, thus grave-robbing is excluded. His sense of marvel and wonder may not yet be full faith, but he is moving in the right direction. God vindicated Jesus, and Jesus will soon personally vindicate the sorority who were his first preachers! God's ways are disturbing old forms!

A. Consensus Of Critical Historians: Ten Facts To Consider¹

1. Jesus died due to the rigors of crucifixion and was buried.
2. His disciples despaired because his death challenged their hopes.
3. The tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered empty on Sunday.
4. The disciples had real experiences they believed were appearances of Jesus.
5. The disciples were transformed, even willing to die, for the truth of the events they witnessed. People do not die for what they know is untrue.
6. This gospel message was the center of preaching in the early church.
7. The message was soon proclaimed in Jerusalem, the very city where Jesus died. The authorities made no attempts to produce the body which would have ended it all.
8. The Christian church was firmly established by these disciples with great risk.
9. The primary day of worship became Sunday, the day Jesus was reported to have risen, and not the Jewish Sabbath. Something happened to cause this major shift.
10. James, Jesus’ previously skeptical brother, was converted when he believed he saw the resurrected Jesus. Paul, a leader in the persecution of the church, was also converted by a real experience which he believed to be the risen Jesus.

B. Jesus’ Twelve Resurrection Appearances

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|-----|--|------------------------------|
| 1. | To Mary Magdalene | John 20:1-18 |
| 2. | To Mary and other women | Matthew 28:1-10 |
| 3. | To Peter | Luke 24:33-34, 1 Cor. 15:4-5 |
| 4. | To two disciples on way to Emmaus | Luke 24:13-35 |
| 5. | To Ten apostles | Luke 24:36-49 |
| 6. | To Eleven apostles | John 20:24-31 |
| 7. | To Seven apostles | John 21 |
| 8. | To all the apostles | Matthew 28:16-20 |
| 9. | To five hundred disciples | 1 Cor. 15:6 |
| 10. | To James, Jesus’ unbelieving brother | 1 Cor. 15:7 |
| 11. | To all the apostles again | Acts 1:4-8 |
| 12. | To Paul the persecutor, somewhat later | Acts 9:1-9, 1 Cor. 15:8 |

C. Summary Of The Recipients Of Resurrection Appearances

1. He appeared to women and men. He appeared to friends and enemies.
2. He appeared to individuals, small groups, and large groups.
3. He was observed indoors and outdoors, in the morning and in the evening.
4. He was seen, heard, and touched. He ate and drank with the disciples.
5. He appearances were physical and bodily.
6. He appeared to some people a single time and to others multiple times.
7. His encounters demonstrated natural and supernatural qualities.

This is a lot of evidence! What do you make of it all? Are you a convinced Christian?

¹ A is edited from www3.telus.net/trbrooks/garyhabermas; B and C are from K. Samples, *7 Truths That Changed the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 19, 22. For a recent video, see rezproject.com/evidence-for-the-resurrection-gary-habermas.

TOO GOOD NOT TO BE TRUE

“Why do you seek the living among the dead?”

In their superior intelligence, angels love sarcastic questions!

LUKE 24:5b

It was bad news. The doctor used the word *terminal*; three months remained. Just time to get her affairs in order, including a talk with the pastor. She told him which songs she wanted, what Scripture read, what outfit to be buried in. She wanted her Bible in the casket with her. As he turned to leave, she remembered something, “Oh, there’s one more thing.”

“What’s that?”

“I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand.”

The pastor looked bewildered.

She explained, “In all my years of attending church pot-lucks, when the plates were cleared, someone would say, ‘Keep your fork.’ I knew something better was coming- velvety chocolate cake, deep-dish apple pie. When people ask ‘What’s with the fork?’ you tell ‘em, pastor, ‘Keep your fork. The best is yet to come!’”²

She faced death with holy humor. When her lady friends passed by the casket to say things like “Didn’t Marge at the Dippedy-Do-Salon do a good job on her hair?” and, “She always did look good in light pink,” she declared by means of a Bible and a fork that “the best is yet to come, at least as delicious as chocolate cake.”

Where does such faith come from? From spice-laden women on sunrise missions to find a stone moved and a tomb emptied. It comes from angels with sarcastic questions to women who go and tell skeptical men “the best is yet to come” and to delight that the girls got it first. Robust, realistic, humorous faith comes from a Lord who’s not only alive but available to sustain his followers.

² “Keep Your Fork,” *PreachingToday.com*, 4/16/2000.

All my life as a church-kid I believed in Jesus' resurrection. I recited the Creed, heard the stories and sang *Up From The Grave He Arose* every Easter. I never thought to doubt it; I was taught by people I'd learned to trust. The revelation to me as a nineteen year old was not that Jesus was alive but that *he was available* to help me, not way off and far away running the universe and tending to quasars. *Alive* and therefore *available* is what Easter means when it gets personal.

Because Easter is in the bloom of spring, it's also important to understand what it's not, and here Bishop Willimon wrote:

"Easter is not about the return of the robin... or crocuses or a butterfly coming out of the cocoon or any of that pagan drivel. It's about a body that somehow got loose. The accounts strain to describe what happened, but don't make any mistake, they're trying to describe something unearthly.... So I can't talk about 'the eternal rebirth of hope' or 'Jesus living on in our hearts.' We're talking about a dead Jew, crucified, who came back to harass us. And it scares the heck out of us!"³

Something eerie happened, and it happened only once. The body of Jesus was exhaled through the linens and *beamed-up* (a la Star Trek!) by the power of the Spirit⁴ into the Father's presence from which he then appears, waltzing back into space and time in a series of appearances to confirm his resurrection and reclaim his followers.⁵ Jesus receives a new body that takes up and transforms his flesh, now out of reach of death and freed from the limits of space and time. This is not resuscitation back to this life to die again (like Lazarus and others), but resurrection- not into a disembodied heaven but into the new creation which awaits us at the end of the age.⁶ Not a ghost, not a spirit, but a transformed solid body, the first of its kind, a body suited to the coming new world, a body still bearing open wounds so his full history goes with him. It's not the cancellation of Jesus' earthly life but its honoring and fulfillment. Jesus has gone into God's future to bring us back a clue what's ahead. This world is not to be scrapped but restored just as he was restored. The one who

³ Edited, "Pumping Truth to a Disinclined World," *Leadership*, Spring 1990, 131.

⁴ Romans 1:3-4.

⁵ See 24:12b and John 20:1-18 on the linens.

⁶ Marcus Borg, "Thinking About Easter," *Bible Review*, April 1994, 15.

preached the kingdom has been vindicated, which is precisely what singles Jesus out from other religious leaders, even in his own tradition.⁷ Moses and Elijah are in heaven according to Jewish reckoning, but they remain- like all the faithful dead- without resurrection bodies.⁸ They are still waiting, but not Jesus; he has been stamped *approved* by the highest authority in resurrection. There's only one prototype, and it's him! C.S. Lewis wrote:

"He has forced open a door that had been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because he has done so. This is the beginning of the New Creation. A new chapter in cosmic history has opened."⁹

The Empty Tomb And Angels(24:1-7).

This is where our story begins, with a gruesome Friday and a silent Sabbath, a day for the awfulness to sink in. It was a quick burial. The corpse was washed and wrapped in linen. No time for spices to be purchased. That would have to wait till after the Sabbath. The expectation was for the corpse to decompose on a low shelf for a year after which the bones would be stored in a stone box and the slab freed for its next occupant.¹⁰ It was the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea; Jesus was its first resident.

⁷ On the uniqueness of Jesus and Christianity, see Dinesh D'Souza, *What's So Great About Christianity* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2007), Chapter 25, "Jesus Among Other Gods: The Uniqueness of Christianity," 284-291.

⁸ For a two stage post-mortem existence (heaven after death now + kingdom later), see N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008, especially Chapter 4, "The Strange Story of Easter," 53-91, and his earlier work, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 2003). The key work on historical method is now Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2010).

⁹ From his book *Miracles*, quoted in Michael Green, *The Empty Cross of Jesus* (Downer's Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity, 1984), 132.

¹⁰ On the archaeology of ancient tombs, see John Dominic Crossan & Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2001), Chapter 6, "How To Bury A King," 230-270. On Jewish customs, see Byron McCane, "The Scandal of the Grave," *Christian History*, Issue 59, Summer 1998, 41ff.; Vassilios Tzaferis, "Crucifixion- The Archaeological Evidence," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, January/February 1985, 44-53.

Jesus was buried because he was dead. The body was released to Joseph by Pilate and quickly prepared. A heavy round stone was rolled into a groove cut just below the mouth of the low entrance to keep out scavenging animals. The women saw the whole thing, including how the body was laid inside the tomb.¹¹ They were eyewitnesses. They knew the location; there was no mistake. It was customary to gather at a tomb for a week of public mourning. The spices they brought on Sunday would make it a bit more tolerable, a breath mint for the halitosis of a grave.

Thomas Jefferson is honored as a founding father. As a learned man Jefferson read the Bible, but he was a deist and rational skeptic. His God was a distant deity who wound up the world and left it to run by its own laws without interference, therefore all references to the supernatural are errors. In an act of true hubris, but consistent with his beliefs, Jefferson took scissors and cut out all references to the supernatural from the Bible. He confined himself to the moral teaching of Jesus. What was left was published as *The Jefferson Bible* with the approval of Congress. And if you find a copy, here are the last words of the gospels, “There laid they Jesus, and rolled a great stone to the mouth of the sepulcher and departed.”¹² The rest of the story, the messy stuff about an empty tomb, angels, and encounters with the risen Lord, is gone. It was all a misunderstanding by people who wished for things that weren’t true and invented stories to match their dreams. How thoroughly modern!

No thanks, Mr. Jefferson, I prefer the messy version. Your denials too much of the evidence. I don’t believe in your deistic God, the distant observer who cannot save. Ours is an *involved* God, one who fully *immersed* himself in the unpredictable and brutal web of history. In the words of Dr. Timothy George, Jesus enters

“...*the real world*... where a black man in Texas is dragged to death behind a pickup; where darkness and evil sometimes seems to have the last word. The God of Easter did not shun this real world but came into the thick of it, hugging unwanted children, forgiving prostitutes, dining with scum, getting his hands dirty in acts of mercy, blessing, and love so real and so deep that they could not be crushed by death itself.”¹³

¹¹ 23:55-56.

¹² R. Kent Hughes, *1001 Illustrations* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 1998), 353-354.

¹³ “Commentary,” *Books and Culture*, March/April 1999, 4.

You are either a deist or a Christian. Either you let the Bible critique your philosophy or your philosophy will cause you to dismiss much of Scripture, even if you don't take scissors to it. Either we have a present and involved God, or else all our talk about salvation is a joke.¹⁴

The sabbath ended at nightfall; by then it was too dark to go to the tomb. Three women are named in our story, Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James- *likely Mary the Lord's mother*, but the others are not named. At least five women, more likely seven to ten. Our band of sisters give eyewitness continuity. They've been with Jesus in Galilee; they are now in Jerusalem, at the cross, at the burial, at the tomb early. Thank God for faithful women who were no threat.

Luke uses the word *found* two times in verses 2 and 3. The women *found* what they did not expect- an open tomb- and *did not find* what they did expect, which was a ripe body to be pickled in spices. They were *perplexed*, a Greek word indicating mental confusion. The logical deduction was grave robbers. But why take the body and leave the linen behind? Linen and spices were valuable. But what if the stone was not moved so a body could be taken out but so someone could see it was gone by other means. The empty tomb alone did not bring faith. It needed explanation.

"There ain't gonna be no Easter this year," a student once announced to Dr. William Lane Craig.

"Why not?" he replied.

"They found the body."

Dr. Craig continues, "Despite his irreverent humor, my friend displayed a measure of insight often not shared by modern theologians. Many are perfectly willing to assert that Jesus died and rotted in the grave, but that the resurrection still has value as a symbol of 'newness of life' or 'new beginning,' so that Christianity can go on quite nicely as though nothing were changed. My friend's joke implied that without the resurrection Christianity is worthless."¹⁵

¹⁴ See Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, 53-76; *Simply Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2011), 191-205 for a biblical worldview of heaven and earth as *overlapping and interlocking* in the one interactive creation, visible and invisible.

¹⁵ Calvin Miller, *The Book of Jesus* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 488-489. For an apologetic treatment, see Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2008), Chapter 13, "The Reality of Resurrection," 201-212.

I agree; if the tomb is empty for any other reason than the resurrection *transformation* of Jesus' corpse and the resurrection *transportation* of the new form to a locale with God beyond the power of death, then Christianity is one, big worthless fraud, and I need to get a real job! John Updike put it in a poem:

“Make no mistake: if he rose at all
it was in his body;
if the cell's dissolution did not reverse,
the molecules reknit, the amino acids rekindle,
the Church will fall.”¹⁶

But that's getting ahead of the story. What we have is a band of women inside a tomb processing contradictory evidence. Where's the body, and why is the tomb open?

We ordinarily think religious experience brings new clarity- which it eventually does; we forget it first brings confusion. The normal flow of consciousness is disturbed by a new reality. To their perplexity was added fear when two beings suddenly stood beside them clothed in lightning, fresh from the glory of God whose messengers they are. There is only one appropriate response to such a visit from the invisible world, and that is to get on your face! The enigma of the empty tomb needs to be interpreted, and that is what the angels do; they give God's perspective, first with a question and a statement, then with a reminder of Jesus' earlier prophecy.

“Such a nice bunch of ladies here in the dirt. They're looking in the wrong place and don't know it. Where he is, they can't find him. Should tell them?”

“We have to. It's why we're here.”

“At the count of three. One-two-three, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.’ Now they have something to ponder.”

I believe God delights in leading us along towards divine revelation. How is it that God moves us out of our common sense approach to things (i.e. dead men don't rise) to a new world of faith and understanding (i.e. Jesus is permanently alive as the world's rightful ruler)? Not all at once; that would overwhelm us, but a step at a time in a way that engages the whole of our beings: our emotions, our bodies, our minds. Because they speak truth from God, angels don't have to say a lot. Their communications are typically brief and pithy. What they give in verses 6 and 7 is not

¹⁶ Idem.

new information, but old information in a new context. The angels remind the women what Jesus taught on five different occasions, “Remember how he told you...”¹⁷ Angels love to point to Jesus and his words, and if they don’t, they are not angels from above but from below, so send them packing.

There is, let me remind you, no new divine revelation. It ended in Jesus. Everything is measured against that. God came once in person; what else can God show us? What we have in our day are new applications of old revelation under the Holy Spirit’s teaching office. Anything that does not accord with the truths we have in Jesus and the Scriptures and the Creeds is to be rejected, even if it’s delivered by an angel who says you’ve been chosen to give the world the missing pieces. It’s what led Joseph Smith astray with his secret glasses and buried tables to give us the new religion of Mormonism. A sure path to error is to claim, “We have something *new!* We have something that goes beyond what God has given in Jesus.” In theology novelty is a bad thing.¹⁸ I proudly have nothing new to say; I hope to have some new ways of saying old things, but no new content.

This is also one way that you can distinguish between *progressive* Christians and *classical* Christians, and *classical* here does not mean conservative in the political sense. Classical Christians can be political radicals with a keen social conscience.¹⁹ Classical Christians believe revelation is complete and yet needs to be applied to new situations. Modern Christians who are highly enamored with human experience and unfolding human knowledge make the claim that God is revealing new truths and that the church needs to get on board before it gets left behind, even if it undercuts Scripture. This explains why they float off after fads and often seem embarrassed by fixed things like the Bible and the Creeds. Being trendy and hip and relevant and well-thought-of in academic circles is a high virtue for progressive brothers and sisters. I, on the other hand, believe the most relevant thing the church can do is keep reading the Scripture through the lens of the Creeds and praying for

¹⁷ 9:22, 44; 17:25, 18:32-33, 22:37.

¹⁸ Our best teacher on this counter-cultural topic is Dr. Tom Oden.

¹⁹ See Shane Claiborne, Tony Campolo, *Red-Letter Revolution: What If Jesus Really Meant What He Said?* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2012).

the Holy Spirit to set it on fire in the church.²⁰ When you actually take time to read the Doctrinal Standards of our church, you find they support this position, which is the main reason our standards are so often ignored. My feet are nailed down to the Scriptures and the faith of the church. It's what I promised to uphold at ordination. I don't want to live holding a wet finger in the air to see which way the winds blow. The issue is, Has God spoken? And secondly, Do we even care?

The ministry of angels and the ministry of the Holy Spirit are similar; they both point to Jesus. "Remember how *he* told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise." They already had the key in hand, but prior to the resurrection it made no sense. No first century Jew expected a single figure to be raised. Resurrection was to happen at the end when God raised all the dead as a prelude to judgment. What happened in Jesus was a genuine surprise, a lone resurrection within time, one man standing vindicated, his every word and deed stamped approved.²¹

In order to move the women *forward* to new understanding, the angels referred them *backwards* to the words of Jesus, "*Remember* how he told you...." That is how the church advances, not by running off after some new thing but by being driven back deeper into the revelation we already have. We listen to the sociologists and psychologists and the historians and the physicists; we are open to knowledge wherever it comes from, but then we go back to our own deposit and pray for the Holy Spirit to illumine it that we may remember it and act upon it faithfully in new situations. Because we are modern people in love with novelty, we are much too easily impressed with this or that study and this or that supposed expert. But classical Christians are those who are more impressed with divine revelation, with what God self-revealed in Jesus and recorded in Scripture. We are open to the world, but we are also grounded in what God has shown us of the divine life.

No one saw the resurrection, only its results. It was a secret event in a dark

²⁰ For an elaboration of this line of thought, see William A. Abraham, *The Logic of Renewal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 153ff.

²¹ For a brief survey of options, see N.T. Wright, "The Transforming Reality Of The Bodily Resurrection," Chapter 7 in Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1998), 111-115.

tomb between the Father and Son as energized by the Spirit.²² Perhaps there was a flash of light. Our best guess is Jesus just vanished out of the tomb, a moment in which his body was transformed. Same identity- it really is Jesus; same body- the wounds are there as identifiers, but a new form with new powers. Freed from the limits of space and time and beyond the power of death. The evidence he left behind was negative, an empty tomb and discarded linens. The angels interpret the evidence which is later verified by appearances of the risen Jesus who steps in and out as easily as we cross the thresholds of our homes. Conclusion: Jesus has been bodily raised.

This was no mere resuscitation; Jesus did not cheat death to come back as before. It was not a *near-death* experience but *thru-death* to a new reality. He conquered death by going *into it* and being raised *out of it*, and it was not spiritual if by spiritual you mean less than fully embodied. The resurrection is not about God taking some part of Jesus- his spirit or soul- to heaven and then having him appear again as some sort of ghost. It really was a body, one that could be touched, one that could eat, but with new powers. Resurrection is a whole new physics.²³

The resurrection, Jesus' past and ours future, is inescapably corporeal.²⁴ The Creed does not say, "I believe in the eternal immortality of the soul," but "in the resurrection of the dead."²⁵ Our flesh is not headed for destruction but for glorification. We are genuinely human but not yet fully human. Many of our capacities can only be realized when we are raised and the accumulated crud of sin, evil and ignorance is removed forever. What happened to Jesus is promised to us.

It's also not reincarnation. Jesus lived *once*, died *once*, was raised *once*. This was not his millionth journey through life with the last one ending in the nirvana of

²² Romans 1:4.

²³ For a recent evaluation of the historical evidence, see Craig Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 330-349.

²⁴ For a defense, see William L. Craig, "The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus," in *Gospel Perspectives I*, edited by R.T. France (Sheffield, Eng. JSOT Press, 1980), 47-74.

²⁵ Article III of the United Methodist "Articles of Religion" reads: "Christ did truly rise again from the dead, *and took again his body* (ital. ad.), with all things pertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day" (*Book of Discipline 2012*, 64).

resurrection. That may be Hindu or New Age doctrine; it's not Christian. You go around *once*; we are called to repent of our sins *in this life*, not re-live our lives up or down the scale of being as a pig or a prince. You can only be born again *in this life*. The chance to start over is now, not after death in a cycle of endless returns, which is finally a deception to make this life seem less ethically serious and morally weighty than it is. *Today* is the day of salvation. The Lord is calling you to himself and to his cause in the world *today, now, at this moment* with real and permanent consequences.

A New Community (24:8-12)

Have you noticed that when people are excited about something you don't have to tell them to share it? They do it spontaneously as overflow. When in love, they show it. When good fortune comes their way, they tell it. When the man who changed your life and been judicially murdered is alive again, you tell it, which is what the women did. Verse 8, "And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told *all this* to 'the eleven' and to *all* the rest." They told it to *all*! They gushed all over the apostles and anyone who would listen.

It's why we need a stream of new converts in the church, those who are still in the first flush of faith. They remind the rest of us of the wondrous beauty and power of Jesus Christ! The tragedy is they often get the same response as the women did from the apostles, verse 11: "...but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. Just a bunch of hysterical women in some religious fever; you know how easily influenced they all are. They'll get over it soon enough."

If Jesus is alive and available, why should we be surprised if on occasion people have encounters that shake their lives to the core? It is a contradiction to claim Jesus is alive and then to be resistant to the fact that he's still doing personal business with people through angels and answered prayer, spiritual gifts, deliverances, prophecies, visions and dreams, healings and miracles, addressing them through Scripture and circumstances.²⁶ This stuff never stopped in the larger church; it's just that we United Methodists don't talk about much any more, and we certainly don't encourage it! Why, things might get out of control! Something might happen that's not in the bulletin! We used to major in the wise interpretation of primary religious experience; now we are allergic to them! We are such modern people, such

²⁶ On the possibility of miracles, see the two volumes of Craig Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility Of The New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011).

a bunch of skeptics. We value control and predictability over the surprises of faith. Much of our life is designed to keep the holiness and wildness of God at a safe, mannerly, manageable distance. We are more deist than we care to admit.

The way things start and the way stories are told give permanent shape to a people. The consistent witness of the resurrection stories is that *the women were first*. In a world where female testimony was suspect, Jesus made them his first witnesses, and the men were the first skeptics! When the truth came from the angels through the women, the guys did not believe it, first because the message itself sounded crazy, secondly because the messengers were female, and everyone knows how emotional and gushy women can be. Right guys? Wrong!

But the word of God remains potent, even when it comes from despised witnesses. So powerful it stirs Peter beyond skepticism to make a run to the tomb, and when he arrives to say to himself, “The women were right. It is empty; the linens are here, but no angels. What’s it mean, and where is my friend Jesus?”

I tell you where he is, Peter; he’s waiting just beyond sight watching his people struggle, not only with the revelation of his resurrection but with the fact of their prejudice. So Peter goes home in wonder and marvel says Luke, a step closer to full faith, confused at a higher level, but still not there yet. No angels met him at the tomb. Why should they? They’d already sent the truth through the women, and Peter and the rest would just have to live with it a while. Jesus, apparently, is an equal opportunity employer who takes a little affirmative action to set things straight.

So if you are a woman who’s been taught always to defer to men and not to take your own religious experience seriously, Jesus wants to stop your pattern of sin and call into a new dignity as a full partner. It will not be easy. And if you are a man who dismisses women as a matter of habit and believes men can and ought to run the really important things in the world- including the church- then Jesus wants to stop your pattern of sin and call you into a messy new partnership with the other half of the human race. It is not easy for either sex to do business with Jesus, because it so changes the habitual ways we’ve thought about and relate to one another. We must both repent, though in different ways. We need each other, and we need the risen Lord and his helpers the holy angels in our midst. Jesus wants a new people.

All this to ponder, and Jesus has not yet made an appearance! What a way for the church to begin! When God acts, people change! And when God acts in

surprising ways, people have to change in surprising ways.²⁷ Dr. Wolfhart Pannenburg, the eminent German theologian, after a lifetime of historical reflection on the resurrection, says it all boils down to this:

“The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it, you have to change the way you live.”²⁸

Conclusion

The resurrection of Jesus is endlessly fascinating. It happened to him; it's promised to us. It means solitude is never loneliness. No matter what happens to or around us, there's hope. A God who kicks the end out of a grave is never without resources. This flesh of mine, polluted by sin and marked with death, is designed to share the glory of God. One day we get to find out in person. I'm betting my life on it? What are you betting your life on? If you got something better, please tell me.

When Columbus sailed in 1492 the motto of Spain was the Latin *Ne Plus Ultra*, “There is nothing beyond.” People believed Columbus would not return but sail off the edge of the world. Then one day a set of sails appeared on the horizon and a man returned with word of a new world. And what did the king of Spain do? To his credit he dropped the *Ne* so the motto reads *Plus Ultra*, “There is more beyond.”²⁹ Some do it by a crest, others by a fork in their dead hand; Jesus did it in person.

Because our future has been secured by God, and because we have a sneak preview in the resurrection of Jesus of a world made new, we are freed to live in faith and in hope and in the courage of risky love now. Whatever happens, it's going to be OK. A lot can happen between here and there, but the shape of the future is already settled and publicly announced. I believe in the resurrection of Jesus, and I want its full implications to flood my life and the life of this church. Help us, Lord!

²⁷ On the multiple implications of Jesus' resurrection, see Ross Clifford, Philip Johnson, *The Cross Is Not Enough: Living As Witnesses to the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012).

²⁸ PreachingToday.com search under *resurrection*.

²⁹ D. James Kennedy, “Message from an Empty Tomb,” *Preaching Today*, No. 66.
