

JESUS IS NO GHOST

Luke 24:36-49 | Third Sunday of Easter | April 12/15, 2018

“Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

Juva Jesu

In the name of our living Savior, dear brothers and sisters:

“There are no such things as ghosts.”

Perhaps you have spoken those words to a frightened child, who’s convinced a phantasm has taken up residence in his closet. And you were right. There are no such things as ghosts, if by “ghosts” you mean the spirits of the deceased who still roam the earth, haunting the living. Scripture is very clear about what happens to us when we die. **People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment** (Hebrews 9:27). At the moment of death the souls of believers go to heaven, the souls of unbelievers go to hell. This’s basic – Bible 101. Now certainly the devil and his minions can impersonate the dead and play all kinds of tricks on us, but that’s another topic for another time.

In spite of what the Bible says, Americans are fascinated by ghosts. TV shows like *Ghost Hunters* fill the airwaves. Many communities offer paid tours of famous haunted sites. Right here in Manitowoc you can enjoy a night of terror at the charmingly named *Dead by Dawn Dead and Breakfast*. People have been fascinated by ghosts for millennia.

Again, the Bible makes clear that there are

no such things as ghosts. More importantly, the portion of God’s holy Word before us today makes clear that JESUS IS NO GHOST. This is a fact that is well established. This is a truth that kills fear. This is a certainty that inspires our witness.

I. A fact that is well-established

It’s evening on the first Easter Sunday. Two disciples have just made the 6 mile run from Emmaus to Jerusalem to tell the disciples the amazing news: Jesus lives! This is not the first time the disciples have heard this news. **While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”**

How did they react? Huge smiles? Loud whoops and hollers of joy? No. Luke tells us: **They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.** This isn’t the first time they thought Jesus was some kind of phantom. Matthew reports: **When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear (14:26).**

Why did they think Jesus was a ghost? Well, think about. People don’t usually walk on water. People don’t generally

come back from the dead. When they saw their Lord ambling across the waves, when they saw their crucified and buried Teacher standing before them, their minds retreated to childish superstition. It's a ghost!

Jesus is no ghost. And he proved it. I want you to notice how gentle Jesus is with these frightened men. He could have said, "You dummies! I told you I would rise. Didn't you listen to a thing I said?" None of that. Instead, with characteristic gentleness and patience Jesus said. **"Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."** He held out his hands and said, "Fellas, it's really me. Go ahead. Touch me. It's me, your old Teacher, the same flesh-and-blood Savior you've spent the last three years of your lives following."

Then he took it a step further. It's almost as if he said, "I can see you're still not convinced. OK. I get it. You know, I'm kind of hungry. Got anything to eat?" They had some fish on hand. Then Jesus did something that – under any other circumstances – would have seemed totally mundane, not even worthy of comment. He ate a piece of broiled fish.

Then, Emril-style, Jesus kicked things up another notch. He said: **"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."**

The cure for doubt is the medicine of

God's Word. Sometimes we may wonder: Why does the pastor always keep talking about the same things? Why is the sermon always about Jesus – his life and teachings, his death and resurrection? Because like the disciples we have our moments of doubt. We wonder: *How can God really love me, when he allows this trouble, this trial, this temptation into my life?* What is the cure for such anguish and doubt? It is – always, always always – the Word about Christ, the gospel. Hearing Christ's Word and promises again and again assures us, comforts us, and brings us his peace.

Jesus piled up the evidence: his physical presence, the fish dinner he ate, the witness of the Old Testament Scriptures. These things established the fact: Jesus is no ghost. He rose bodily from the grave. He is the living, victorious, flesh-and-blood Savior. This is the truth that not only drives away doubt – it kills fear.

II. A truth that kills fear

Those disciples were hiding out in Jerusalem because they were scared of Jesus' enemies. And then they cowered when he appeared to them thinking that he was an apparition. They were afraid.

What scares you? What fills your heart with fear? For most of us it's not ghosts and ghouls. What scares us is bills and bottom lines. What scares us is unforeseen changes in life and an unpredictable future. What scares us is fragile relationships and deep depression. What scares us is chronic pain, old age and obvious mortality. What scares us is

how big the temptations and how little our strength. What scares us is the guilt of sin and the fear of a well-earned eternity in hell. These fears are not fake or unfounded. For sinners like you and me, they are all-too-real.

But Jesus is real too. He is our real, flesh-and-blood, fully-alive Savior. That truth kills all our fears. You see, Jesus took all our fears, all our pain and sorrow, all our sin and guilt and carried it to the cross. There, on that awful instrument of shame and torture, the Son of God poured out his precious, priceless blood, the full payment for the debilitating debt of our sin. Joseph and Nicodemus, carefully and reverently buried his broken body in a beautiful new tomb. They rolled the large stone over the entrance. Jesus enemies put a seal on the stone and posted a guard. But none of it - not the stone, the seal, the guard – not even death itself could hold Jesus. On the third day he burst from the grave, fully alive, body and soul.

The fact that Jesus rose bodily from the grave is so important. You see, sin impacts our bodies too. Sin causes injury, illness and finally death. But Jesus defeated death. How can you tell? Because he didn't just rise spiritually from the grave. He rose bodily too! His victory was complete. He didn't just take away the spiritual effects of sin, but the physical consequences as well.

This means that we have the certainty right now that Jesus has defeated our enemies, that sin, death and Satan are

vanquished, that our sins are forgiven and our eternity is secure. This also means we can look forward to a life free from illness and injury, pain and sorrow, a life free from hunger and thirst and want of any kind, a life free from hospitals and nursing homes, sympathy cards and cemeteries. One day we too are going to burst from the grave like Jesus did, to live body and soul with our flesh-and-blood Savior for all eternity.

An empty tomb, a risen Savior – these truths kill our fears. And they also inspire our witness.

III. A certainty that inspires our witness

Jesus said, **“This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”**

These disciples weren't going to be able to keep sitting on their hands behind locked doors for long. They had work to do! The tomb was empty! Their Lord lived! It was their job to share this news far and wide. Jesus even promised to send the Holy Spirit to empower them for this great mission.

The mission hasn't changed. It has remained exactly the same for the last 2,000 years. Tell others about Jesus. Share

the good news of the risen Christ. Preach the forgiveness of sins in Jesus name to all nations, beginning for us right here on the northeast side of Manitowoc.

Brothers and sisters, we don't go out to share the teachings of Muhammed. We don't share the wise sayings of Confucius, or the wisdom of Buddha. Those guys are dead, buried, gone. Jesus lives. And so, as Paul tells us, our **labor in the Lord is not in vain** (1 Corinthians 15:58). Just the opposite. Our labor in the name of Jesus, our witness of his saving love, matters. It matters more than anything else in the world.

We can do this. We can invite our neighbors to church to hear the Word of the risen Christ. We can share with our friends and family the good news of the living Savior who loves them so much that he bled and died and rose for their salvation. We tell our coworkers about the One who gives rest to the weary, peace to the broken-hearted, and joy to the sorrowing. And we can do it all with the full confidence that the Word of our living Savior works because it is the **"power of God for salvation"** (Romans 1:16).

Ray Parker Jr. famously sang, "I ain't afraid of no ghost." Friends, if Jesus were a ghost, if our Savior did not rise bodily from the grave, we would have every reason for fear. Our faith would be in vain. Our sins would not be forgiven. Our future would be filled with terror. But **Christ has indeed been raised from the dead** (1 Corinthians 15:20). Jesus is no ghost! Let this biblical truth silence your doubts,

drive away your fears and inspire your witness. With joy and confidence, share the good news of your living Savior with the world that desperately need to hear it. In the name of our living Savior: Amen.

S.D.G.