

The 3rd Sunday of Easter, April 19, 2026
St. Andrew's Church, Kitchener
Holy Communion/Eucharist, 8:00 a.m./10:00 a.m.
Revised Common Lectionary (Yr. A): **Luke 24:13-35**
Preacher: Gerry Mueller

You might find it hard to believe, but clergy are sometimes ever so slightly cynical about the habit of some of the flock to only worship on high feasts.

"The Church never changes!" one infrequent attender complains. "You're right," says another, "Every time I go there's flowers everywhere and they're talking about resurrection!"

I'm sorry, but it is **still** Easter, and I'm going to talk resurrection some more!

A preacher, noting the difficulties of preaching at Easter, suggested that many Christians find the **theology** of the resurrection difficult. Sorry; I don't think it is the **theology** that is the problem, I think it is the **fact** of the resurrection! Theories about the resurrection of Jesus abound, and most are just clever attempts to get around the **fact** that 20 centuries ago a man was nailed to a cross, died, was put into a tomb, and after three days the tomb was found empty and the man was seen several times by witnesses, not always the **same** people, apparently alive and well. The Emmaus road story we just heard is only one such time. It is this **fact** that is at the **centre** of the Christian faith; it is this **fact** that you **have** to accept if you call yourself a Christian.

Over centuries explaining away the seeming impossibility of the **fact** of the resurrection, to **defuse** it, to make it **acceptable**, palatable, understandable has been something of a cottage industry, and if we are honest, a respectable way to write papers and books, and earn an academic income!

Most common are **fraud** theories; fraud by the disciples, fraud by the authorities.

The simplest suggests the disciple just made up the resurrection. The tomb wasn't empty on Easter morning, the resurrection appearances of Jesus didn't happen, it was all a fraud!

Then **why** didn't the temple authorities or the Romans open the tomb, produce the body of Jesus, and end the deception? Wasn't it to prevent such a fraud that a guard was put on the tomb, Roman guards who would testify to an **undisturbed** tomb?

Or the tomb **was** empty, but it was the temple authorities or Romans who removed the body, lest the **disciples** steal it and use it for their purposes. Then why not produce the body when the disciples spread their inconvenient rumours of a **resurrection**?

Or, it was the disciples that stole the body and proclaimed the resurrection? At least a dozen people, likely more, would have to conspire and keep the secret, no matter what. From what we know of the lives of the apostles, only **one**, John, died in his bed. Of the

other close followers of Jesus not many died of old age; most came to **nasty** ends still protesting the truth of their message; Jesus who had died on the cross had been raised from the dead. Given their behaviour at the arrest of Jesus, when all ran away, and Peter even denied **knowing** Jesus **three** times, is it reasonable to believe that not even **one** of them would betray the fraud to save their life?

And then there is a whole family of "Jesus never died" explanations. In some of these someone else died on the cross; Simon of Cyrene is a favourite, because it was he who helped Jesus to carry the cross. There is of course nothing to prove this, and one can ask that since people who knew Jesus witnessed the crucifixion and prepared the body for burial, surely the substitution would have been noted. And the previous arguments against fraud would apply; a largish number would have to be in on the fraud, and willing to suffer and die for it.

The most entertaining variety of this family of fraud explanations is that Jesus was still alive when taken from the cross (how he survived a spear thrust to the heart is usually just ignored). One elaboration is that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married (before or after the crucifixion is treated as irrelevant), travelled or were smuggled to Europe, where they had a son who married into a Frankish royal family, the Merovingians, thus founding a royal line and a mysterious order known as the Priory of Sion. And if that is

vaguely familiar, it is because that is the back story to Dan Brown's novel *The DaVinci Code*.

It would be fun to fully elaborate on that, but we do want to **leave** here **today!** The short version is that Brown got most of his "theory" from a book by Michael Baigent, *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, and that theory is based on a play on words, the Latin *san greal* [holy grail] and *sang real* [blood royal], and the Koine Greek *soma* and *ptoma*, both of which can mean live body or corpse and are used interchangeable in the Gospels and the writings of that time. Throw a whole bunch pseudo-history into the mix, and you have Baigent's thesis. Baigent sued Brown for copyright infringement, and lost to the tune of about 3 million Pounds. Baigent doubled down, re-wrote his book calling it *The Jesus Papers*; all the publicity got the attention of serious biblical scholars and historians, and the kindest of those wrote things like "[the book] employ[s] the rhetoric of authentic history, but not its method, to present myths as fact", and "the book [advances] a preposterous idea in stages - first as a wild guess, then as a tentative hypothesis, and lastly as an undeniable fact - but entirely from within a miasma of bogus authenticity." Needless to say no serious scholar subscribes to any of this as a serious explanation of the resurrection, and it only finds currency among wild conspiracy theorists. (And you though biblical studies was dull.)

Enough of fraud, it simply won't **do** as a theory! What about hallucination then? The various resurrection appearances of Jesus were hallucinations! If so, they were remarkably vivid, and unlike hallucinations psychologists have studied. They happened to different sets of people, alone or in groups, not always the same people present, and yet have a certain consistency. The Jesus of today's Gospel appeared on the Emmaus road, and walked with and taught two travellers, could enter into logical discussion, and handled food. Witnesses see a Jesus who can be touched, who roasts and eats fish, who teaches and empowers. Other appearances, such as the one to Thomas in last week's Gospel, are of a touchable, solid Jesus. Not your **usual** hallucination, psychologists tell us. And again, given what we know of the earlier intestinal fortitude of the apostles, is it likely that even one, let alone all but one, would be willing to die a painful death for a hallucination?

Moving right along, to the third class of theories about the resurrection, the **spiritual** resurrection theologies. The disciples had spent so much time with Jesus, and had heard so much of his teaching, that after his death they **felt** he was still present with them in a **spiritual** way. They could draw on their past experiences of Jesus and **in a sense** have him present with them. **Nice**, but it doesn't really explain the bald declaration "We have **seen** the Lord!" It doesn't explain the reported physical reality of Jesus with them (unless you postulate both spirituality **and** fraud)! And it especially doesn't explain how these illiterate fishers and

farmers could suddenly proclaim a **complex** theological message of salvation by death and resurrection with **convincing** power. And again it really doesn't explain the subsequent fate of the apostles!

Enough!

In philosophy and in science there is a principle called Occam's razor. Named after William of Occam, a 12th century Franciscan scholar, in essence it suggests that one shouldn't think up a complex theory to explain something when a simple theory will do the job. Applying that principle to the resurrection and its many "explanations," suggests that perhaps the **simplest** explanation is to take the biblical account and subsequent history at face value; Jesus who died **was** resurrected on the 3rd day after his death, he appeared to his disciples in a physical and yet also non-physical body, and then went to be with God, sending the Holy Spirit to empower them to take the message of Jesus into the entire known world.

Ah, you say, or maybe **OK**, but I'd **still** like to know just exactly **how** Jesus was resurrected. What happened in that first Easter night, between sundown on the Sabbath, and sunrise on the 1st day of the week? Tell us what **happened!**

I haven't the slightest idea! But **unless** you want your God weak and docile, conforming to human expectations, and subject to human physical restrictions, then God can resurrect **anyone** God pleases! To the God who created the universe and holds it in existence the resurrection of his son Jesus to a body both physical and spiritual would not be difficult. And **I** don't need to know the mechanism of the resurrection, because **I** have **seen** the Lord! And before you call the wagon, and the guys in the white coats with the nets, let me explain. There have been a few times in my life, **a very few**, when I have experienced a power beyond myself, a presence within me, a guide beside me, **working** in my present reality. It has been a real enough experience that I made fairly drastic life changes to follow the call of that power. I can come up with a whole load of explanations for my experience, (and I have!), but the simplest (remember Occam's razor) is that **I** met the **risen** Christ.

And, if I might be so presumptuous, **so have you**. Why **else** are you here? Why **else** do you get up on a Sunday morning, early, struggle to get dressed,, drive or walk, to get here? Somewhere in your life, the risen Christ came to you, in both a physical **and** spiritual way, and you were convinced enough by that encounter that here you are, like me, hoping to meet him **again!**

If you read beyond the end of today's story it goes on seamlessly to another appearance of Jesus, to the disciples and the Emmaus travellers. He says to them,

*Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. **You are witnesses of these things.***

Ancient authorities and contemporary scholars are not agreed on how the last words in that should be punctuated (the Koine Greek does not have punctuation) and the last complete sentence could also be, "**Beginning from Jerusalem, you are witnesses of these things.**"

It starts in Jerusalem, with the first witnesses to the resurrection of Christ. And it spreads from that to all the then known world, and from then through the centuries to today, to **me**, to **you**. The risen Lord comes to his disciples then, and now, empowering, encouraging, challenging - **sending! I am** a witness to the risen Lord! **You are** witnesses. It didn't end then, it happens **now**.

We have seen the Lord. **Go! Tell! Act!**