

“REALITY, NECESSITY, URGENCY AND POWER”

Luke 24:36-49, Easter 3-B, April 15, 2018

St Paul is certainly making a very valid observation for us in the 2nd chapter of I Corinthians, isn't he--when he asks us: *“For who knows a person's thoughts except for the spirit of that person which is in him”?* Then St Paul carries this same line of reasoning even further by pointing out to us: *“Therefore no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God!* And yet we are living in a day when more and more people claim to be “paranormal!” To be “paranormal” means that you profess to have supernatural powers that:

- (1) May enable you to read other peoples' minds; or
- (2) To foretell the future; or maybe even
- (3) To communicate with the dead.

Do you know that such claims multiplied exponentially here in the United States--during that period of time known as the VICTORIAN AGE, that lasted from 1825 to 1900; by people who believed could communicate with the blessed dead by holding something that became known as a “séance”?

At a séance some 6 to 7 or 8 people were gathered together at a round table, normally once the sun had gone down in a rather darkened room that was only dimly lit with a few candles atop that table.

Something I never knew, but learned recently--is that there was usually some type of aromatic food placed atop that table; like some freshly-baked bread--right out of the oven, or some homemade soup! It was some type of pleasant smelling food that would be used to attract the spirits of the blessed dead--which these paranormal people believed were still blessed with voracious appetites.

You know if Jesus' disciples had been hosting a séance in that Upper Room in Jerusalem on that first Easter evening, they may not have been nearly so surprised, startled or frightened, when suddenly and most unexpectedly, the Crucified, Risen and Glorified Christ was present there with them!

In the final chapter of St. Luke's Gospel (24), he describes three post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples. In verses 1 through 12, Luke also tells us about those several women who went down to the tomb, early that first Easter morning, at dawn, only to discover to their own great horror that the stone that had been strategically-placed there to block the entryway to Jesus's tomb had been rolled away!

According to Luke--these courageous women walked into that empty tomb--and there--became visible to them two men dressed in dazzling apparel--*that asked them: “Why do you seek the living among the dead? Don't you remember how he told you that following his death he would be raised to life again on the third day (v. 7)?* Luke, like John, mentions Peter being at the empty tomb earlier that morning too!

Then the Risen Christ appears to two disciples making their way back to Emmaus (Vv. 13-32), a village 7 miles from Jerusalem--following their celebration of the

Passover; Cleopas and his unnamed companion that are kept from recognizing Jesus. Along the way, our Risen Lord said to them: *“Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory”* (v. 26)?

But then we come to our Gospel lesson this evening--Luke's version of what happens--when the Risen Christ appeared to all of them in that Upper Room that first Easter evening!

1. Christ's first words to them are words of peace! *“Peace be with you!”* the Risen Savior said to them. This is the kind of “shalom;” that kind of “peace” that was--and still today--is an all-encompassing kind of peace; that brings the full favor of the Heavenly Father to bear upon his peoples' lives!

Friends, I read recently about a man who says that he was blessed with a very kind and loving earthly father while growing up, who though his father grew angry with him at times--never seemed to stay angry with his son for long.

This man recalled being in the 11th grade, when he unfortunately had run a stop sign and carelessly wrecked the car that his parents had given him. Once his father determined that no bodily harm was done to his son or anyone else, well to use an old expression, he really “lowered the boom on his son! But a couple hours later, while seeing how remorseful his son seemed to be, the father said to him already then: *“Oh, I supposed I'll let you drive occasionally!”* And by 8:30 PM that same evening his father approaching his son dangling his car keys before his eyes--and told the son to drive his car to the local grocery store, to *purchase a jar of peanut butter.*

Yes, this man sounds like a loving father to me; but not nearly so loving as the Heavenly Father who sent his Son into the world to reconcile every one of us to him in spite of our many transgressions!

2. Jesus refutes their false presupposition that they are simply looking at a ghost! When Jesus first speaks to them, their reaction is that they were startled; they were frightened and they thought that they were seeing a ghost! And so again, instead of being impatient with them, instead of being angry with them, Jesus said to them: *“Look at my hands! Look at my feet! Look at my scars! I'm real! I've got a body! Ghosts don't have bodies as you can plainly see that I have! It's me! I am standing right here in front of you: (verses 37-38)!”*

But even when Jesus had now spoken to them through his own lips, Luke tells us: *“The disciples, disbelieved for joy”* (v. 41)! It sounds, a lot like to me, that these disciples were saying to each other: “It's too good to be true!” So at this point Jesus says to them: *“Have you anything here to eat? By this action Jesus is saying to them: “I'm real. I'm asking you to believe Me not because I'm not real but because I am. I'm asking you to believe Me not because I'm a spirit and I don't have a body but because I do have a body and I'm standing right in front of you — believe Me!”*

My friends, in this Gospel lesson this morning we can see our God doing his best to convince us of four great spiritual truths: The reality of the resurrection, the necessity of the cross, the urgency of our taking the message out to the world and fourthly of the power God will supply to his church to accomplish each of these goals in the Promised Gift of the Holy Spirit still to be poured out upon these disciples.

(1) The reality of his resurrection. The risen Lord was no phantom or hallucination. He was real. The Jesus who died was in truth the Christ who rose again! Christianity is not founded on the dreams of disordered minds or the visions of their fevered eyes, but on One who in actual historical fact faced and fought and conquered death and rose again! Secondly, he seeks to convince us of:

(2) The necessity of the cross. Why it was to the cross that all the Old Testament Scriptures looked forward. The cross was not forced on God; it was not an emergency measure when all else had failed and when the scheme of things had gone drastically wrong! It was part of the plan of God, for it is the one place on earth, where in a moment of time, we see the clearest vision of God's eternal love. Furthermore, our Savior seeks to convince us of:

(3) The urgency of the task. Out to every corner of the globe and to all the different peoples of this world, God's invitation to call people to repentance of their sins, and to offer them his blood-bought forgiveness, was to go! The days of our Savior's sorrow were now past and the tidings of his Easter joy were now to be taken to every nation! Furthermore, our Savior seeks to reveal to us:

(4) The secret of God's power. The disciples were all told, to wait in the city of Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high; when the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon them on that first Pentecost Sunday.

There may have been some among the disciples then--who may have felt--they were wasting time, just as sometimes the Church today must wait for God to give to her, her next set of marching orders!

Action without preparation is most always a foolish venture: Haste makes waste as the old saying goes! There is a time to wait on God and a time to work for God.

One of the most peculiar things about Luke's resurrection story here (Luke 24:36-49) is the way Jesus identifies himself to his friends: "*Look at my hands and my feet!*" he says to his frightened, doubtful disciples.

They are, no doubt, shaking in their sandals. They are wondering if they are having a group hallucination when he offers them four sure proofs that he is who he claims to be: Two hands and two feet, ten fingers and ten toes, which could belong to one else but him. It is the wounds he also wanted them to see, in his outermost extremities but also in his pierced side!

Why didn't Jesus simply say: "Listen to my voice!" or, "Look at my face!"

I want to close by telling you a true story about a man whose father had died rather suddenly and most unexpectedly of a severe heart attack. What made this reality such a difficult loss for his son to bear, he said, is: "Because I never had even the slightest opportunity to say "good-bye" to my father, or to tell my father one last time: "Dad, I love you!"

The first chance this man had to see his father was to see him as a corpse laid out in a casket at the funeral home, where he walked right up to the casket and took one of his father's big quiet hands in his own. His father's hands, he remembered, were strong and skillful hands; hands that could fix almost anything!

They were strong enough to build a porch swing and soft enough to pat a baby on its back to sleep!

His father had been an auto-mechanic who took great pride in distinguishing himself from what he called "shade-tree mechanics," those backyard amateurs who covered themselves with grease and left spare parts lying around all over the place. He on the other hand, was a garage mechanic, who plied his trade as carefully as a surgeon. He kept a clean shop, and before he went home at night, he scrubbed his hands as thoroughly as he could with a boar's bristle brush, washing away the grime of the day, with a special hand soap named LAVA!

But as careful as his father was, his hands always stayed stained in places, and it was these stains, this man said, that he was looking for when he picked up his father's rough hands. Turning his father's big hand over in his own, he saw the motor oil in the fingerprints, the callouses dark from years of hauling engines and he smiled. "It's him alright! They tried to clean him up, but they couldn't! It's my father! It's really him!"

"Look at my hands and my feet," Jesus said to them and when they did they saw everything he had ever been to them. They saw the hands that had broken bread and blessed broiled fish. They saw the hands that had pressed pads of mud against a blind man's eyes and taken a dead girl by the hand so that she rose and walked away. But they also saw the hands of their dearest Friend--that were nailed to a cross--to redeem them also as sinful men to their Father in heaven! AMEN