

## Easter III, 2024

### Eating a Fish: Luke 24:36-49

Who believes in ghosts?

Once upon a time, pretty much everyone did. These days not so much.

Can anyone think of ghosts in the Bible? (prize)

1 Samuel 28, the ghost of Samuel; (or *maybe* Act 12, Peter at the gate?)

**Anyway. The first most important lesson from today's Gospel: Jesus Christ is not a ghost.**

Jesus Christ is not a ghost. You know that, says St. Luke, because he sat there and ate a piece of fish. Touch me and see, he says, a ghost does not have flesh and bones, like you see I have. And to prove the point, he downs the fish.

Just like in the story of the empty tomb, or of Doubting Thomas, here we go again. The Bible is absolutely insistent. Jesus Christ is risen bodily from the dead. He isn't a ghost.

But *why* is the Bible so firm on this?

Number 1: because it happened. You wouldn't make this stuff up. It would be a hell of a lot easier to say, we saw his ghost. Or these days, perhaps, to say: his spirit lived on. His example still inspires us. His values remain. None of things sound mad. But the early Christians chose, instead, to say something mind-bogglingly, outrageously, weird. The man we saw tortured on the tree; the man we saw *die*, the man we put in a tomb ... he's back. We found his tomb empty. And then ... he came, and we sat down with him, and we talked, and we had supper with him. We had supper! The early Christians *knew* this sounded mad. The only reason they'd say something so barking, is because that's what they'd experienced. That's what had happened to them. That's what God did.

But *why*? Why would God do things that way?

Well, firstly perhaps because of something else the Bible insists on, and which also sometimes sounds very odd. The second most important lesson today. **It is this: your body is good. Your body is good.**

We can have very mixed up feelings about our bodies. Mine, clearly is wonderful. Rippling muscles, classical good looks, quite the Adonis. But generally people don't like their bodies. They feel too big, too small, too clumsy, too weak, too ugly. And people can also be very afraid of their bodies. They get sick, they go wrong, they die. And so people have often been very dismissive of them, they say, oh, that's just the shell. The real you is different, the real you is inside, the body's just a container. We're so used to hearing that that some people even think it's what Christianity says, but no. The Bible says: God made your body. Your body is good. It might be messed up like the rest of you, but it's still good. And it's still *you*. There is no invisible you inside your body. Your body is you.

Which leads to the third big lesson for today. If your body is good, and your body is you, **your body is getting raised from the dead**. Your body is getting raised from the dead. This is what Christianity says. God made the body, and God's going to save the body. He's going to love it forever. It doesn't just get tossed away, left behind. What happened to Jesus, will happen to us. He wasn't a ghost, and we won't be either.

But what *will* we be then? Will we be just like we are now?

Well, there's a balance in what the Bible teaches on this. Sometimes, like in this story from Luke about eating the fish, it sounds *very* like what we are now. It sounds like when we're risen from the dead, we'll sit round eating and drinking like we do now.

Other times in the Bible, the resurrection life sounds *very different* from life now. When St. Paul saw the risen Jesus, all he saw was a blinding flash of light.

The truth is, no-one knows exactly. No-one knows exactly what the life after death is like. Nobody knows exactly what we'll look like, feel like, be like.

St. Paul has a brilliant way of describing it, I think. He says – at the end of a chapter where he's been thinking all about the resurrection of Jesus, and what it means for us - is that the relationship between our bodies in the world to come, and our bodies now, is a bit like the relationship between a flower and a seed. Say an acorn and an oak tree.

Now if you didn't know already, and someone told you that acorns become oak trees, you'd laugh at them. You'd say oak trees are nothing like acorns. You'd say they're unbelievably different. You'd say acorns *couldn't be* oak trees.

And yet, you do know it. You *know* that in all that staggering difference, in all that unbelievable transformation, there's still one real bodily life going on. Acorn to oak tree, it's the one same bodily story.

It's the same with caterpillars and butterflies. Staggering difference - the one same bodily story.

Acorns and caterpillars, my friends. That's what the Bible says we are. One day, because of Jesus Christ, we'll be oak trees and butterflies. We'll be unbelievably, staggeringly, astoundingly bigger and better and brighter than we are – and yet it will still be us, still one and the same bodily story. This body, our here and now body, it will go. It will die. We'll put it into the ground as dust and ashes. But listen to what Paul says in that same chapter: what is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.

Jesus Christ was not a ghost. We're not going to be ghosts. God made our bodies, he made us as bodies, and he's going to make us new ones, bodies of beauty and power and glory and spirit that we can now barely begin to imagine. We're acorns, wondering what it's going to be like to be oak-trees. Frankly, we've no idea. We can't even begin to comprehend it, it's like that blinding flash of light. But the Gospel is, because of Jesus Christ, that's going to be us. As somebody once said, getting it bang on, if you believe in Jesus Christ, you are but a shadow of your future self. If you believe in Jesus Christ, you are but a shadow of your future self.

That's the Easter Gospel! To the one who is going take us, take us in our entirety, and make us new, to him be the glory forever and ever. Amen!