

The Case for a Living Christ. Luke 24: 1-12, 13-24

Hope: Lost And Found, by Jeff Strite (Apr 3, 2016). SermonCentral.Com

Some years ago Sesame Street faced a dilemma. Will Lee, the actor who played Mr. Hooper, passed away, and the producers were very concerned about how to communicate the concept of death to the 10 million children (most of whom were under six years of age) who watched the show.

Child psychologists suggested they NOT say, "*Mr. Hooper got sick and died,*" because children might become afraid that if they get sick, they will die.

And the psychologists also suggested they NOT say, "*Mr. Hooper got old and died,*" because little children think of their parents as being old, and might become afraid that their parents will die.

And the staff of Sesame Street decided to avoid religious issues (it was on PBS, after all) and NOT say, "*Mr. Hooper died and went to heaven.*"

So the show's producers decided to say just a few basics: He's gone, he won't be back, and he'll be missed. And they decided to use Big Bird to gently set the matter before the children. The show was aired on Thanksgiving Day so parents could watch it with their children.



Big Bird came out and said he had a picture for Mr. Hooper and he couldn't wait to see him.

One of the cast said, "*Big Bird, remember, we told you that Mr. Hooper died.*"

And Big Bird said, "*Oh yeah, I forgot.*" Then he said, "*Well, I'll give it to him when he comes back.*"

And one of the staff members put an arm around Big Bird and said, "*Big Bird, Mr. Hooper isn't coming back.*"

"*Why not,*" Big Bird asked innocently.

"*Big Bird, when people die, they don't come back.*"

**When people die...they don't come back.
Normally, that's how it works, and this bothers a lot of folks.**

Sigmund Freud famously said: "*And finally there is the painful riddle of death, for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably will ever be!*"

Aristotle called death the thing to be feared most because "*it appears to be the end of everything.*"

Jean-Paul Sartre asserted that death "*removes all meaning from life.*"

And French philosopher Francois Rabelais (as he was dying) said: "*I am going to the great Perhaps.*"

People have always struggled with the concept of death.
I'm told someone did a survey once and found that one out of every one people... dies.
And that so far the best efforts of the medical community have resulted in a 100% death rate...makes you wonder why we pay so much for medicine.

Everybody dies.
And they generally STAY that way.
And While Jesus' had assured his disciples that this time would be different, even they knew that dead people don't come back.
That's how it works.

And that brings us to today's Scripture lesson.
That is not what happened that first Easter morning. **You can tell that Jesus' disciples just could not wrap their minds around this idea that he, Jesus, had done exactly what he said he would do.** And when you think about it, their reluctance makes sense. After all, dead people don't come back. They heard the story that women told of the empty tomb and angels announcing Jesus resurrection...and they just didn't believe it.



But at least Peter "*got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, WONDERING to himself what had happened.*" (Luke 24:12, NIV).

Our pew Bibles say he was "amazed" at what happened, But I think that the New International Version better expresses Peter's state of unbelief. [Reader's note: some ancient manuscripts lack verse 12, moving directly from the unbelieving disciples to the grieving pair on the Emmaus Road, emphasizing even more their lack of belief .]



John's Gospel further records that while two of the women immediately return to tell the disciples their story, Mary Magdalene stays behind weeping by the open tomb. Apparently, she was not even aware that she was talking to angels when they asked her, "*Woman, why are you weeping?*" since she replied, "*They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have laid him.*"



Then Jesus walks up to Mary and asks her the same question: *Why are you weeping?* Now, thinking he's just a gardener, she pleads with him to give her the body so she herself might take it away herself. (John 20:13-15).

He's not alive, he's been taken.

That is a logical conclusion because the dead don't come back.

Jesus had to have been moved by SOMEBODY!

That was the rumor that the startled soldiers were paid to spread around town (Matthew 28:11-15).

That certainly is the rumor that the disciples on the road to Emmaus were believing: Somebody has taken the body. So right now, just like the tomb, their hearts are very empty. They had also heard the story about the angels; they did not buy it either.



Then they encounter this stranger on the road who asks them what they've been talking about...and they tell him the whole story...all about Jesus—a powerful prophet who did many miracles. They shared how He'd been arrested and crucified. And what the women were saying about the tomb being empty. They even told this stranger the story about the angels.

But then they say one of the saddest things: "...***we had hoped*** that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel..." (Luke 24:21)

"We had hoped..."

What they were really saying was

"We don't expect it now..."

Once we thought Jesus was really the savior.

We had this thing called hope

but now, our hope is gone."

Jesus HAD BEEN our hope.

But now he is dead.

He's been executed.

And we know, the dead don't come back!!!

As Aristotle noted death is feared most because "*it appears to be the end of everything.*" So, people are naturally afraid of death.

When Sesame Street was debating about how to tell children that Mr. Hooper had died, their child psychologists suggested they NOT say, "*Mr. Hooper got sick and died,*" or "*Mr. Hooper got old and died,*" because little children might become AFRAID. Sesame Street's experts wanted to protect the children from the FEAR OF DEATH.

But they offered them NOTHING to deal with that fear.

"Big Bird...Mr. Hooper's not coming back, because the dead don't come back!"

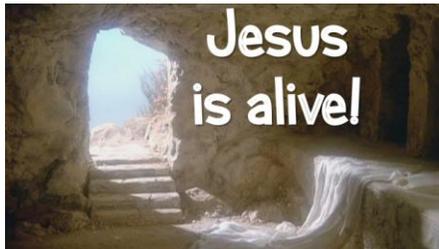
Essentially they were saying "Honey, when you die they're going to put in you a six foot deep hole and cover you with dirt and that's where you'll stay...forever. You're not coming back." That's got to be REAL encouraging!

But that is not what happened with Jesus; on this first Easter morning a dead man did come back...just as he had promised he would. And someday those of us who believe in Jesus will also rise again!

A five-year-old boy, was standing at the graveside by the casket of his dearly beloved Grandpa. He looked down into the deep empty hole and he looked up at his momma and asked "*How's grandpa ever going to get out of that grave?*"

And you know what that mamma did?
She told him about Jesus and Easter!
She said: "Don't you worry about Grandpa coming out of that grave, because Jesus already has come out of the grave. When He calls, Grandpa will pop right up out of there. And so will the rest of us, because Jesus promised us that is what will happen.

That morning Jesus Christ did come back to life, and just as he promised that will also be our experience, someday. This is the very foundation of why we are Christians. You take the Resurrection of Christ out of Christianity—and there is nothing left!



Paul wrote to some doubters: "...how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith..."

*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile;
you are still in your sins.
And those also who have died in Christ have perished.
If for this life only we have hoped in Christ,
then we are of all people most to be pitied."*
(I Corinthians 15:12b-20)

[A sarcastic aside] Ah... that's just a bunch of religious stuff... that never happened. Paul just made it all up because he wanted to create a religion!
We all know that the dead don't come back!

But Paul said "**Yes they do!**
I KNOW Jesus rose from the dead... because I saw Him."

Christ died, he was buried, and he was raised the third day...and HE APPEARED

- *to Peter,*
- *to the twelve.*
- *to more than five hundred at the same time,*
- *Then to James, (his brother)*
- *then to all the apostles,*
- *and last of all he appeared to me (Paul)*
(I Corinthians 15:3-8)

"...what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that HE APPEARED

- *to Peter,*
- *and then to the twelve.*
- *After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.*
- *Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,*
- *and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born."*
(I Corinthians 15:3-8)

No...it's not made up. **Jesus really did die.**
And Jesus really did come back to life!

A woman once wrote Dr. J. Vernon McGee: ... *"Our preacher [not me!] said that on Easter, Jesus just swooned on the cross and that the disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think?"*

McGee replied, *"Dear sister, beat your preacher with a leather whip with 39 heavy strokes, nail him to a cross, hang him in the sun for six hours, run a spear through his side, put him in an airless tomb for three days,...and see what happens!"*

Christ's rising from the dead is the basis of who we are, and everything we hope for. As Christians we believe that we too will live again...just as he promised. That's the reason why Jesus came...*to seek and to save us*. With his return to life, Jesus proved that we have truly been forgiven by God, that we too can live in newness of life and we no longer need to fear death.

Since, [all humans] share flesh and blood, [Jesus] himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the **fear of death**. Hebrews 2:14-15

Have you ever gone down into a cave, either spelunking or on a guided walk? Some people are deathly afraid of caves or other dark and enclosed spaces. But I love going down underground, because I want to see what is down there. I am not afraid; it's an adventure.

That is also why I don't fear the grave. Others have gone there before me...and one person has come out of the grave—Jesus Christ. So I don't fear the grave because he proved that it's just a doorway to a new adventure... and I want to see what is on the other side.

The poet, Calvin Miller once wrote:

*"I once scorned ev'ry fearful thought of death,
when it was but the end of pulse and breath,*

*But now my eyes have seen that--past the pain--
there is a world that's waiting to be claimed.*

*Earthmaker, Holy, let me now depart,
for living's such a temporary art,
And dying is but getting dressed for God,
our graves are merely doorways cut in sod."*

(PAUSE)

The message of the empty tomb, which Jesus' grief stricken disciples could not yet comprehend, is that just as Jesus both promised us and proved, we too will live again.

Now, let's see how He broke this good news to those grief blinded disciples on the Emmaus road.



They're filled with despair.
They couldn't even look him in the eye.
They've given up and they're going home.
Why doesn't Jesus immediately tell them who He is?

But, He doesn't. *"While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him."* Luke 24:15-16

Now hold that thought for a minute. (PAUSE)

Then after they told him their sad story, Jesus replied: *"Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!"*

I know we can't hear how Jesus said this to them from the written text. The words make it sound like Jesus was mad at them. But do you REALLY think that Jesus would get angry with these men? Of course He wouldn't. I think He spoke these words with a loving and equally grief stricken heart; because Jesus always grieves to see people grieving. **He came that we might have hope, not grief.**

One of the prophecies about Jesus was that He wouldn't "*break a bruised reed or put out a smoldering wick*". In other words He wouldn't treat people roughly if they were struggling or hurting.

Now, if you were thinking you were something special or treated others with disrespect, He might slap you upside the head...but not if you were filled with grief like these men were. They were hurting. They'd just seen Jesus, betrayed, brutally beaten and then die on the cross. And now they're filled with despair because their hopes had been dashed.

So how did Jesus deal with these men?

He dealt with them the same way He deals with us.

And He dealt with them the same way we should deal with those around us who are struggling. He didn't tell them who He was because that would have ruined the approach He took with them.

1. First, He listened to them. He asked them what they were talking about. Now, He KNEW what they would say, but He still wanted to hear their story. He wanted them to talk it out... He WANTED to listen to them. When you're dealing with people who struggle... the first thing you need to do is let them tell you their story. Listen to them.
2. Next, Jesus reminded them of the promises from Scripture. "*... beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*" (Luke 24:27). Too often, we make the mistake of trying to offer people our opinion, our viewpoint, how we see things rather than what God has to say. Now, your opinions and views have value, but they don't have the same power as God's written word. Without knowing the promises of God...people have no hope. Unless you can share the hope of God's promises...you can't help.

Oftentimes people think of "Christianity" as just some kind of ancient teaching based on musty old books and letters that well...it's all in the past. And that's how these two men on the road to Emmaus were thinking. Jesus HAD been alive... but He's dead now. **He was... but now He's not!! And that does change everything.**

3. Lastly, He gave them something physical to hang their faith on. "*When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him*" (Luke 24:30-31).



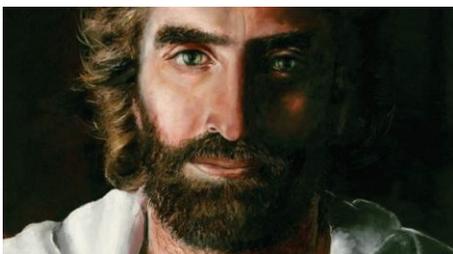
Immediately after WW II, the Allies gathered all the hungry, homeless children and placed them in large camps where they were fed and taken care of until they could get them back to health and find them a home. But at night the children did not sleep well. They seemed restless and afraid. Finally, a psychologist hit upon a solution.

He instructed the attendants that when they put the children to bed, they were to give each one a slice of bread to hold. If they wanted more to eat, more was provided. But that special slice of bread was not to be eaten--it was just to hold. And it was like magic.

The children went to sleep, subconsciously feeling that they'd have something to eat tomorrow. And that assurance alone gave the children the HOPE they needed to make it through the night.

Both the night he was betrayed, and the day he rose, Jesus broke bread with his disciples to remind them of himself and to give them something to hang on to. We do the same thing even to this day, for the same reason. We still share the bread and the cup to remind ourselves of Jesus in us and we in Jesus, to open our eyes to our living savior who is still with us, to refresh our hope.

There is a very interesting movie now playing called **The Case for the Living Christ**; it's a true story about how a Pulitzer Prize winning investigative reporter Lee Strobel became a Christian. Back in the 1980's, not long after the Jones Town Massacre, Strobel and his wife, both confirmed atheists, were living the life they pleased...until Strobel's wife went and "got religion." Watching her publicly profess her faith and begin to change, threatened to tear their marriage apart. So, Strobel set out to rescue his marriage by proving that everything about Christianity was just a fake. When the newspaper's religion editor gave him permission to write a critical article about the resurrection of Jesus, Strobel told him, "*you know with this story, you are giving me a loaded gun.*" His boss replied, "*I'm not worried, I don't believe you will pull the trigger.*" And now, as they say, you know the rest of the story. Strobel not only did not debunk Christianity, rather he proved it to himself--kicking and screaming all the way--but he ended up himself becoming a believer. Strobel and his wife continue to live happily ever after. So this movie is actually a love story. It's about how Strobel learned to love his wife as they both learned to love Jesus.



Dead people don't come back...but Jesus did, and that changes everything.

Yes, Jesus did rise from that grave. Over 500 documented eyewitnesses in his day verified this. And yes, Jesus is still alive
But you can't truly know His presence until you also believe He lives.

In this case—regardless of what they say in Missouri, believing is seeing. God designed us that way...so that we would want a savior, would seek Him out, and to believe it when we meet Him. Since we no longer live in His day, this is something we now do in our hearts...trusting the witnesses who did see Him and gave their lives telling the story. Believe His story of God's love for you and His desire to forgive you, and get to know Jesus your Savior.

How about you?

Have you met the risen Christ yet?

Let's pray about this.