

# A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

By Burt L. Burleson

**“The Last Supper”**

Luke 24: 36b-48

April 30, 2006

Here's the paradox. The gospel is simple and easy to understand... The gospel is a mystery and beyond understanding. It's a paradox, deal with it.

The faith revealed in scripture is something our children can get... **“You're loved, say yes to it.”** And it's also something, you'll never totally get. **“You're loved and you just don't understand all you've said yes to.”**

We have to keep that in mind as a church... When we read the bible there are layers to be revealed. And there are ways of reading the Bible that change what it is we read.

Now... and this is really important... reading it in all these ways is important. You have to have them all. Our kids need one thing... our youth another... and adults are hopefully ready for even something different. It's important to the church and to the gospel that all of these ways of understanding be addressed.

We have to do it all and we have to live in the paradox. The gospel is simple and as Paul says to the Galatians... **“You're going to be in big trouble if you go adding anything to it.”**

But it's also a problem when we don't invite folks deeper into the mystery. I have so much to teach you and... As Paul says, **“Now, we're looking through a dark glass.”** There is so much to be unveiled.

It's so mysterious and beyond us.

It is so simple and available.

A text like this one from Luke needs to be read with that in mind.

Here you have the disciples gathered back in that room. And they've been hearing some strange things all day... and it's late in the night but no one's going home. That's where they were, Luke says, when Jesus stood among them.

There he was... saying **“Peace be with you.”**

And they're thinking what anyone might be thinking... **“There's a ghost in the room.”** ... Probably aren't saying that... no one just comes right out and says, **“There's a ghost in the room.”** I wouldn't... if I thought there was a ghost in the room. No one said it...

But Jesus can see it in their faces. They have that, **“Hey there's a ghost in the room look about them.”** You can spot that a mile away... So Jesus holds up his calling cards... his pierced hands... **“Relax fellas, it's me... Look, skin and bones and all.”**

Luke says, **“They still didn't believe it... only this time it wasn't out of fear... it was out of joy.”** That's kind of weird. They're too happy to understand this.

Then he eats with them...

And he tells them how the scriptures said all this would be so...

And that they're witnesses to the whole thing...

How 'bout that?

So... Luke's saying to us... **“It happened and the apostles saw it.”** It was kind of frightening and unbelievable... strange at first and they had some trouble believing it but this is what happened. **Jesus died and was resurrected and these folks (that have been preaching to us about it) were eyewitnesses to the whole deal.**

Kind of straight forward and simple isn't it. Here's the story... this is the way it happened. Believe it. There was Easter Sunday morning and on Sunday night they had a broiled fish all church fellowship with Jesus. And some folks saw it all.

That's the truth. Believe it.

But then... the truth is larger. There is this event but there are all sorts of implications and the implications by way of Spirit and good writers and the community are layered into the story.

Luke was written maybe 20-30 years later you know. And there was a context and there were people dealing with a specific time and place... trying to make sense of it. Remember, on Monday morning, the disciples didn't wake up, sit down at breakfast and say, **"Boys, what we've got on our hands is a Trinitarian God."**

No one said, **"Pass the fig jelly and how 'bout that Jesus... completely human and completely Divine... let's call that homoousios."**

And while they were sitting there sipping morning coffee and reflecting on the night before they weren't discussing the implications of the fact that Jesus had been eating some of their flounder the night before.

But the Church did along the way. Especially in a context where Greek philosophy was king of the "navel-gazing hill". Where the thinking was... that we are a soul stuck in a stinking body and that Jesus resurrection was all about getting out of it.

If he even had a body like ours to begin with. See, there was all this discussion about that in the church. Some folks... even some followers of Jesus, were a little nauseous at the thought that God would have taken on flesh. And plenty of them were glad to proclaim that the resurrection is all about the spirit escaping the bonds of the body.

Are you picturing this? In Sunday school discussions and around dinner tables and down at the market place, when Christian folks got to talking about the resurrection there were lots of theories out there and one of them was that Jesus appeared to the disciples but it was more like Patrick Swayze in that movie Ghost.

So, Luke's not just a reporter giving us the facts of Easter Sunday... he's a theologian and a pastor and he's saying, **"There was a bodily resurrection.**

**They saw him,  
touched him,  
he even ate some fish."**

So... we don't just read the text at the literal level and say, "yes it happened," do we? We read it doctrinally. There was a body. God was in the flesh in Jesus and the resurrection involved the body... flesh and bones and that's important... because now we're reading this ethically.

If Jesus had a real body... then bodies aren't bad, bodies are good.

If bodies are good... then it matters what I do and don't do with mine. I'm not just a spirit trying to survive my skin and bones. My body is also a manifestation of God and is a way that I experience God and respond to God.

It matters... It matters so much that Jesus was resurrected with a body. So maybe the resurrection isn't just about my soul getting itself through the pearly gates someday. Maybe all of creation is being resurrected and restored... which is what the Church Fathers taught.

It's all holy and all-important to God. So now we're reading this Easter Sunday night story and thinking, not just Easter happened but,

**"What am I doing with and to my body?"**

**"And what am I doing with and to God's world?"**

**“And with and to the environment.”**

In other words, when Luke wrote this he was intending that we’d read this and ask what we might be doing about global warming, because the physical world is good and it matters. We read the Easter story and ask what kind of car we ought to be driving and what kind of companies we ought to be investing in.

And Luke would want us to be asking about how we pray and whether or not we ever glorify God with our bodies. And whether or not we’ve eaten right... or loved right.

That’s just the way it is with sacred scripture. You read it one-way at first...literally perhaps. But then you look again and it’s about some larger truth... some doctrine. And if it is then it’s about what you value... your ethics.

All these approaches are important and necessary and it’s equally important that you not stop there... there’ll always be more and there is here.

You just keep living with it and living with it.

You keep doing life and doing church.

Walking the path.

And then, there it is, another level of meaning. It’s like Christ opened your mind just like he did the disciples that night.

It’s that way all through the gospels... Jesus is always pulling them aside. The disciples (the one’s committed... following) will see something else. There’s more to see and we cannot see it all in the beginning. It’s simple... It’s mysterious.

I just noticed this last week something in the Sermon on the Mount, I’d never seen.... Just right before the beatitudes. I’d preached that text and preached it wrong so many times.

There are crowds all around Jesus... hurting folks... walking wounded... and I thought he preached to them all... He doesn’t. Matthew says, **“Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.”**

Jesus is advanced spirituality. It’s not God 101.

In the upper room that night, there were folks who knew the words of scripture. They’d even been friends with, been taught by Jesus and still in this moment... he has to open their minds.

That’s the way it is... and along the way we see other things. John himself said in the Epistle... **we don’t yet know what we will be but... we will know who we are when we see him.**

There is mystery to move into and there is in this story.

Jesus appears to and “stands with” the gathered community. It’s The Church... the gathered ones and the living Christ is there in their midst. It’s where Jesus is when 2 or 3 are gathered... **“There he would be,”** he said.

And reading the story carefully and with minds opened perhaps, we see something else. There’s a table... and tables are a big deal in Luke.

Jesus sits down and eats with sinners at them. Folks like Matthew and Zacheus that other tax collector. He eats with Pharisees... he eats with his friends and disciples. Mikeal Parsons says that in Luke the old adage is true, **“Jesus is either going to, coming from, or at a meal.”**

The Kingdom is like a big banquet meal for Jesus and everyone’s invited. That’s the way Luke “shows us” the gospel. (Parsons) It was the way he blessed.

And Mikeal notes in one of his commentaries that the words here about the fish would be better translated, **“He took and ate with them.”** They aren’t just watching in amazement... they’re eating. And I quote our friend.

**“So the image here is not simple of a resurrected Lord raiding the refrigerator one last time before his final departure, nor even of Jesus seeking to demonstrate his ‘bodiliness’ one more time. Rather, we find the resurrected Lord seizing one last opportunity to dine with his disciples.”** (The Storyteller’s Companion, p. 189) So, this is the real last supper.

You eat with those you love. Tables are all about blessing. When something isn’t right with someone... sharing a meal is impossible isn’t it. Sitting there at the table... it’s agony when love has been broken or when there isn’t forgiveness... or inclusion.

In fact, there’s really no such thing is there... as inviting something to a table and not including them. There’s a reason the counters and diners and drug stores were the focal point of the Civil Rights movement.

And there’s a reason that this table is the focal point of this movement.

We’re invited to it because we are included in it.

We can come here to it because even though love has been broken all has been forgiven.

We can come here in all of our fear with all of the “doubts rising in our minds” as Jesus said it so long ago.

... And... with our betrayals and our denials and our abandonment and our wounds... even with our unperceiving, blind enthusiasm... and Jesus will meet us here.

He said, **“Listen! Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.”** (Rev. 3:20)

It’s true and he will.

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