

“Is Christ for *Real*?!”

B, Easter 3; Luke 24:36b-48

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³⁶⁻⁴¹ While they were saying all this, Jesus appeared to them and said, “Peace be with you.” They thought they were seeing a ghost and were scared half to death. He continued with them, “Don’t be upset, and don’t let all these doubting questions take over. Look at my hands; look at my feet—it’s really me. Touch me. Look me over from head to toe. A ghost doesn’t have muscle and bone like this.” As he said this, he showed them his hands and feet. They still couldn’t believe what they were seeing. It was too much; it seemed too good to be true.

⁴¹⁻⁴³ He asked, “Do you have any food here?” They gave him a piece of leftover fish they had cooked. He took it and ate it right before their eyes.

⁴⁴ Then he said, “Everything I told you while I was with you comes to this: All the things written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms have to be fulfilled.”

⁴⁵⁻⁴⁹ He went on to open their understanding of the Word of God, showing them how to read their Bibles this way. He said, “You can see now how it is written that the Messiah suffers, rises from the dead on the third day, and then a total

life-change through the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in his name to all nations—starting from here, from Jerusalem! You’re the first to hear and see it. You’re the witnesses. What comes next is very important: I am sending what my Father promised to you, so stay here in the city until he arrives, until you’re equipped with power from on high.”

I. WE WANT IT REAL!

An elderly woman made her living selling artificial fruit. One day a customer complained the fruit she sold was not realistic enough. She pointed to an apple, saying it was too red, too round and too big to be a real apple. At that point the artificial fruit lady picked up the apple and proceeded to eat it!

“To Tell The Truth”

Do you remember the show “To Tell the Truth?” It was a TV show back a few decades (some of us remember better than others!) In an episode, four celebrity panelists are presented with three contestants (called challengers), and the panelists must identify which is the “central character” whose unusual occupation or experience has been read out by the show’s host. When the panelists question the contestants, the two “impostors” may lie whereas the “central character” must tell the truth.

At the end, after the various challengers are pretending to be the central character for several rounds of questions, the announcer calls out: “Will the real [person’s name] please stand up?”

II. ARE YOU HERE FOR REAL, JESUS?

Our gospel stories in this season, called “Resurrection appearances” feel a bit like an episode of “To Tell the Truth.”

"Will the *real* resurrected one please stand up?" Are you for *real* Jesus? Show us the money! Show us the wounds. Show us the proof. You're really here? In the flesh? With a body? Eating fish, no less!

We want to be sure this isn't more April Fool's action, like on Easter Sunday. Speaking of that, was anyone confused by the bulletin covers today? We figured it might get your attention! Not to cause confusion, but to bring to mind in a real, mind-tweaking visual way, that Easter is *still* among us! We're only on Easter 3 today – it's not over folks!

It's so easy to celebrate all the hoopla of Easter on one day, and put the decorations and eggs and candy away; send home the Easter lilies, pack the Christ Candle back in the cupboard until Advent starts again....

So easy to forget that we are still "Eastering." We have only begun to act like Easter People, even better – Easter *fools* – and remember that Christ is in our midst – living and breathing – more, now than ever.

More Easter! More time to practice being Easter People! More Easter Fools! I encouraged Teresa this week when talking about the theme for today and the music. "Just give us *more* Easter! We've heard these stories so many times and sung these songs, that it's easy to lose the power and the punch! I've preached these stories for over 20 years and wonder if we "get it" – really grasp that we are Easter people, finding Resurrection in our midst, transformed?

III. ARE WE FOR REAL, JESUS?

What does it mean to *really* be Easter People?

To be *real* with each other? With everyone we encounter? To be *authentic*. Not hiding behind a mask or a fear that our true selves are not welcome here?

Those disciples are a little taken-aback and a lot unnerved, (okay scared!), when Jesus suddenly appears among them. They want to see the wounds in the hands and side. And Jesus acquiesces. Here, he even gives them a gastronomical proof of resurrection.

IV. HOW DO WE KNOW AUTHENTICITY?

We want it real. We, like the disciples, need to "test the facts." Fact-check, run it by snopes.com, look for the proof in the pudding. For us, we have to do a "fact check" on ourselves, and others, and on circumstances. To figure out if something or someone is still April fooling, or the real deal.

The "litmus test" may not be whether they eat fish in front of us! But it may be a lot like Jesus coming into the disciples' midst and sharing a meal together – around the Table, on the beach, on the Emmaus journey – when eyes and hearts are scriptures are opened in new ways.

We ask ourselves, as the disciples did: "are our spirits burning within us? Do we find our spirits filled by our interactions with the other, or do we begin to feel, as time passes, that the other is *draining* our spirit. If we find that our spirit is drained by the other in the relationship rather than being filled?

The same goes for the presence of Christ here, today, right now. Was his presentation of peace and love today, in this world as it is right now, with all the wars, threats of wars, worldwide political upheaval, starvation, abuse, natural disasters, dying environment, predation and wealth accumulation at any cost, a total ruse?

He presented himself as bringing only one thing to us...and that is LOVE. Whenever you look around and see something that makes you feel deep down...LOVE...then he exists.

Have you ever had some stranger, en route to some destination for some purpose, stop when you are broken down by the side of the road and offer assistance, possibly taking you an entirely different direction than his or her intention just to make sure you are safe and taken care of? Yep, that's the spirit of Christ touching your life and Christ is in that spirit.

How about those people who have busy jobs that volunteer to some charitable organization or socially conscious cause, giving up some of that precious time of rest to help build a better world. Just as Christ worked only to build a better world through love. (And he certainly gave up a whole lot more than some of his leisure time).

Jesus also presented himself with wounds, still, even after Easter morning. Part of the "real test." Picture the hands of Jesus when he met the disciples after the Resurrection. In the Upper Room. On the Road to Emmaus. Here, on the beach, over breakfast.

Those wounds – whether grief and loss, or trauma or hurt relationships – don't go away just because we are on this side of Easter. But they don't have to keep up nailed to the cross, either. Or stuck in the dark of the tomb, blocked inside by a big rock that just won't roll away.

Those wounds – just as with grief of any kind--become a part of who we are, and a part of our whole, authentic selves as we move forward on the journey. Forward into life, out of the place of death – in the Garden, in the tomb – to run and tell and live with the news of what we have seen, experienced and heart – Christ-sightings!

V. CHURCH THAT MAKES CHRIST REAL?

We've been calling ourselves "a church on the move." And it's true! Not fake news. In a time when many churches, not to

mention countless other volunteer organizations, are not moving. Or, they're moving away or closing up shop, our CUCC is *moving*. Moving forward, in the Spirit, stretching, connecting, growing in all sorts of ways.

We encourage *each* one of you – whether you were born in this church, or this is your first or second time here, or someplace in between, to be *part* of this movement! Join us today, right after church (and I promise – church won't go long – this message will be over soon, so we can move on into the other room and have some lunch and gather together.)

Come, join the circle, and celebrate with us who we are as a congregation, what we're about, what we dream of doing and being in our precious life together going forward, and earnestly seeking the Spirit's guidance and path of joy.

How do we know Christ is for REAL? By *making* Christ real! In ourselves and for ourselves and then shine out that light in our relationships with others. It's up to us, Oh Easter People, to *Make* Christ real. It doesn't happen otherwise!

What does it look like to move into our future as a congregation as if we truly believed and acted as Easter people? If we truly believe that Christ is for real! Now, here, risen among, present in our midst, around our tables, in our interactions with one another.

Yesterday, I joined a hurting portion of our own community, as we grieved together, celebrated the life and deeply mourned the "too soon" loss of a woman in the prime of life. It was very *real*. The pain, the shock, and the need for Christ's tangible spirit, for signs of love and proof of presence. We can't help but "get real" with life when death smacks us in the face.

Can we make Christ real for those all around us, right in our own community of BV, who don't feel they belong in a church? Can we be the hands and feet, the hugs and comforting words that people so desperately need, here, in this Easter season?

VI. IS CHRIST FOR REAL?

Is Christ as real today as he was when he appeared to the disciples and ate the fish?

Christ is right here, right now. See him. Let him touch your soul with his loving spirit. Take him with you and visit with him often. Is this Christ someone who helps fill your spirit? Is he authentic? Can you see him in your life as you reflect on it?

Did you expect he would bring you love? If the answer is yes, then he exists today just as he did two millennia ago and he is as authentic as he was then. You have proof all around you.

I greet you in the name Christ. Do you have anything to eat?
Amen.