

"Ghost Stories" Luke 24:36b-48
Church of the Good Shepherd, Nashua, NH
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My grandfather could tell a ghost story that would make the hair stand straight up on the back of your neck and your flesh crawl with goose bumps. Gathered around their huge kitchen table, supper dishes pushed back, the fried chicken picked clean and the last biscuit eaten, the conversation would slow to a lull between the aunts and uncles. With the cicadas singing in the gathering twilight, and the children squirming on their chairs, Papa Eddie would bring on the tall tales.

"I woke up the other night." Papa Eddie would say. "And I heard voices in the living room."

We would squeal with fear, as enthralled as we were terrified. We knew where this story was going.

"Nannie was asleep and nobody else was here. TV was off. I heard talking and laughing, and glasses clinking like there was a party going on in there."

He would pause and wait for someone to ask: "What happened next?"

"And then the old pump organ began to play," he whispered.

The pump organ that had been broken for decades, played in our imagination as our eyes widened with fear.

"Gip! Knock it off," my grandmother would say. "You're scaring these children to death."

And then it was bedtime.

"But Nannie," we'd wail, stalling at the foot of the crooked staircase in the ancient house, "What if a ghost comes to get us?"

Nannie said the same thing, always.

"Honey, there's no such thing as ghosts. It's the living ones you've got to watch out for."

Watch out for the living ones.

But Nannie's words were lost on us, amped out as we were on sweet tea and drama. We *believed* in ghosts. The past was coming to haunt us.

Do you believe in ghosts? Apparently the disciples did. It was Sunday evening. The once brave followers of Jesus were huddled together in a room, despondent and anxious over what had transpired in Jerusalem over the past few days. Jesus was dead. They had seen the life-blood run out of

him and there was no doubt it was all done but the crying. The powers had crushed Jesus, wiped out his ministry, made a mockery of everything Jesus stood for love, compassion, justice, standing with the outsiders...would they be next? The past was coming to get them.

Depressed and driven by fear they couldn't even begin to imagine how to put their shattered lives back together

The room was mired in silence. Suddenly they became aware of a presence: a stranger, standing among them. An intruder who said "Peace." But they felt anything but peace. They felt startled and terrified.

"It's a ghost," one of them screamed!!! The hair stood up on the backs of their necks and their skin prickled with goose bumps. They wanted to run down the road and not come back for days, but they couldn't move, they were frozen to the spot.

They believed in ghosts, what else could it be? Their past had come to haunt them. The intruder, who looked an awful lot like Jesus, invited them to touch his hands and feet. They ran their fingers over his hands, where the terrible wounds had become scars. This was no ghost!! The stranger asked for something to eat. Without speaking someone handed over their lunch, God knows they didn't have an appetite for it. Jesus began to eat a piece of fish. And they stared. Jesus once dead, was now sitting in front of them eating fish, licking his fingers, wiping his beard on his sleeve.

Now this was someone they recognized. The Epicurean Jesus, always happy to sit down to a meal and to break bread with anyone, anywhere. The Foodie Jesus, savoring every bite as if it was his last. This was no ghost, this was a man they knew.

Later, some would say that they had been hallucinating, that they were having a hysterical grief reaction. Others would say they were crazy. Others would still insist that it must have been a ghost. But we have gathered this morning to affirm that we don't believe in ghosts, but that we have seen with our own eyes the reality of the resurrection.

We piece together the fragments the gospels give us about the resurrection: a glimpse here, a touch there, a look, a word: now you see him, now you don't. We can't prove it or even fully explain it, but we have amazing stories to tell about a resurrection reality. The past came to haunt us until we tasted a startling forgiveness we couldn't earn or deserve. Stories of how wounds we thought would never heal were turned into scars. Stories of how God changed everything for us; changed us.

In her book *Things Seen and Unseen*, Nora Gallagher writes of the resurrection: "Out of the chaos and trauma of death, something new is written or revealed. Jesus walked through the curtain, into the Reality blazing behind it, a place he had grasped and apprehended all his life. Then, because he lived fully in hope, lived fully in love, something happened to him. Nothing kept him, nothing held onto him, the past didn't weigh him down. He returned, more coherent, more real, carrying Reality with him, in a final act of love. Nothing is hopeless anymore." Whether or not I believe in the resurrection makes no difference if I don't make a different life. We are the ongoing story."

Which is more frightening: ghosts or a living Christ who turns our world upside down and challenges us to make a different life? *Watch out for the living.* I think my grandmother was right. The Living Christ will change us into creating a new life that is more just, more loving, more forgiving, a life where the ghosts of the past have no power to define us. *So watch out for the living.* Or in the words of the Nicene creed we will say together:

...look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.