

**LUKE 24:36–49.** (EHV)

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” But they were terrified and frightened and thought they were looking at a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While they still did not believe it (because of their joy), and while they were still wondering, he said to them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb. He took it and ate in front of them. He said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He said to them, “This is what is written and so it must be: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Look, I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

There are appropriate times to be surprised.

If it snows in August, it is appropriate to be surprised.

If your baby’s very first words are, “Please feed me,” it is appropriate to be surprised.

If you ever catch me wearing skinny jeans, it is appropriate to be surprised.

But there are times when it’s not appropriate to be surprised. Although it would have been appropriate many centuries ago, no one should have been surprised at the solar eclipse this past Monday, because meteorologists and others were predicting it and hyping it well in advance, even years in advance, based on the predictable paths and movements of the earth, the moon, and the sun.

The same is true when God’s promises are fulfilled. One of my favorite stories is when Peter was arrested and imprisoned and God sent an angel to help him miraculously escape. Once set free, Peter went to the house of a fellow believer where many people had gathered and were praying, no doubt for Peter and for his release. Peter knocked at the door and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer it. But when she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening the door and exclaimed, “Peter is at the door!”

And what was their response? “You’re out of your mind.” And when she kept on insisting and when Peter kept on knocking, they finally opened the door, saw him, and were astonished. They were praying that God would release him, but they were surprised when God answered their prayer! They shouldn’t have been surprised.

This morning in his Word, Jesus tells us another thing we shouldn’t be surprised at: We shouldn’t be surprised at the fact that he rose from the dead.

**1.**

We shouldn’t be surprised at the fact that he rose from the dead, first of all, because he was standing right there in the flesh in front of his apostles and other disciples. The two disciples

to whom Jesus had appeared while they were walking to Emmaus had just returned to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples that they had seen the Lord. Suddenly Jesus himself stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." It was the same Jesus and he was giving the same peace.

But since they had had the doors locked and since they doubted it could actually be him alive and well, knowing what he had gone through just three days earlier, they thought it was a ghost; the Greek word literally means "spirit." When we think of a ghost, we think of a person who has died whose spirit is now appearing visibly before us in a way that we can recognize them and make out their shape, but they're not concretely there. I don't know what the common idea of spirits was in those days, but it may have been that the disciples were afraid not because they thought they were seeing what we think of as a ghost, but because they thought they were seeing an evil spirit or demon, posing as Jesus. And actually, I think it would be good for all of us Christians to think of all ghosts in that way, namely as evil spirits or demons taking the form of a deceased human, because we have no firm reason to believe from the Scriptures that the spirits of the dead have the ability to show up here on earth. We're only told that, when people die, their spirits immediately return to God for judgment in heaven or hell.

But while it is safe to assume that any spirits we might see are not the spirits of dead people, but are either angels or demons, it is not safe to assume that they are purely figments of our imagination and are not real. Jesus does not tell his disciples, "Why do you think I am a spirit? Seeing spirits isn't even possible!" No, he says, "Why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost [*or* spirit] does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." He distinguishes between living humans and spirits. Spirits don't have solid, concrete form. They don't have flesh and bones. Jesus did. He had hands with nail marks in them that you could grab. He had feet with nail marks in them that you could touch. You could embrace Jesus without ending up grasping at thin air.

And Jesus could eat. He took a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb that they had and he ate it in their presence. I don't know if that, in and of itself, was proof that he wasn't a spirit, since we have the example in the Old Testament of three angels, who are spirits, appearing as humans to Abraham and Sarah and eating a meal while Abraham stood by. So perhaps here it was more the way Jesus ate, which they would have remembered from their meals with him. Or perhaps he was simply proving he wasn't an evil spirit, since evil spirits wouldn't be able to enjoy anything good.

Regardless, all of this taken together showed the disciples without a doubt, and shows us without a doubt, that the one who appeared to the disciples after being crucified was not just a figment of their imagination or an actual spirit, but was truly Jesus in the flesh, alive and well. Don't be surprised that Christ is risen from the dead. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

## 2.

But Jesus especially didn't want them to be surprised that he was risen from the dead, because that's exactly what the Old Testament prophesied. "He said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.'" Sometimes Jesus divided the Old Testament into two parts, the Law and the Prophets, or the first five books of the Bible written by Moses, and all the other books. But here he divides it into three parts, the Law of Moses, the

Prophets, and the Psalms, both to make it clear that the *entire* Old Testament prophesied about him and what he would do, but also to draw special attention the Psalms as containing prophecies about him.

In the first five books of the Bible, Moses told of the Seed of the Woman whose heel would be crushed, but who himself would crush the devil's head, poetically summing up Jesus's virgin birth, his suffering and death on Good Friday, and his resurrection on Easter Sunday in the very first Gospel promise.

Moses also detailed the entire sacrificial system. In so doing, he taught that there was no forgiveness for violations of God's law without the shedding of the blood of a substitute, and the offering of that blood by a priest stepping between God and his people. It was also because of the regulations of that sacrificial system that the date of the Feast of Harvest or Firstfruits or Pentecost came to be calculated starting from the Sunday after the Passover—what we know today as Easter Sunday.

In that system, Moses also taught how any meat given for a fellowship offering would not be accepted if it were left over until the third day.

Moses also told of the coming of a prophet like himself from among the Israelites, a prophet who would know God face to face and to whom the people must listen.

Consider the Scriptures of the Prophets, who told how the Messiah would be born of a virgin, born of the line of David, and born in Bethlehem; how he would come into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey; how he would be punished with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men; how he would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities; how by his suffering he would declare the world innocent of sin; how he would find a grave with rich; how after his suffering he would see the light of life and be satisfied; how everyone who called on his name would be saved.

Consider the Psalms. They spoke in considerable detail about how the Messiah would be betrayed by a close friend, how his hands and feet would be pierced, how his garments would be taken and divided, how he would be scorned by men and despised by the people, how he would nevertheless not be abandoned to the grave or see decay, and how he would declare God's name to his brothers.

Consider how all the words of comfort, peace, joy, and life in the Old Testament only have the fullest ring of truth and certainty in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“This is what is written and so it must be: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

We should also note this simple point here: At all times, back in the Old Testament and today in the New Testament, the true faith has been one. Jesus is saying that those who truly believed in the Old Testament believed in him and were looking forward to his coming, just as we who believe in the New Testament believe in him, celebrate his first coming, and look forward to his second. Modern-day religious Jews who reject Jesus as the Messiah are rejecting what their own Scriptures say.

All of these prophecies in the Old Testament mean that the disciples shouldn't have been surprised when Jesus appeared to them after his death, not if they were listening, not if they were paying attention. And we shouldn't be surprised that Jesus rose from the dead either. It makes

perfect sense. The same God who promised to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and did, the same God who promised to put David on the throne and did, the same God who threatened to use the Babylonians to punish the Israelites and carry them off into captivity and did, the same God who promised to bring the Israelites back out of captivity through King Cyrus and did, the same God whose word never failed to come true in the past is the one who promised that his Messiah would suffer, die, and rise from the dead. So should we be surprised that it actually happened?

Don't be surprised at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if that actually happened—and it did—and if you're not surprised by it—and you shouldn't be—then also don't be surprised when his other promises come true, and the world continues to progressively get worse until the end, and God continues to provide for us and strengthen us day by day, and one day his Son Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead, and he takes us and all who have believed in his promises and their fulfillment to be with him forever in glory.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.