



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

A Stephen Ministry Congregation

www.goodshepherdwi.org

Easter Sunday 2015

“What if Jesus Has Flesh and Bones?”

(Matthew 28:8-9)

Rev. David K. Groth

“So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him” (Matthew 28:8-9).

COLLECT: Almighty God the Father, through Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, You have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life to us. Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of our Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by Your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

I believe the average person in Watertown is comfortable with the message of Easter. It means there can be a new beginning after disaster, dawn comes after darkness, spring after winter. They're comfortable with it but many don't believe it literally. If pressed they'll say the message of Easter is that Jesus' spirit lives on, his teaching, his approach to life lives on. Trouble is if you spiritualize the resurrection like this, you'll have a comfortable story but not the truth. You'll have a nice story, but not Easter, and not the life changing event Easter is.

It's almost as if the Gospel writers anticipated what we would do to Easter. In our text, Matthew writes that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary took hold of his feet and worshipped him. You can't take hold of the feet of a ghost or vision, right? In John, Jesus tells Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side." And in Luke, Jesus says to his disciples, "Look at me. Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me, and see. A spirit doesn't have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

You see what Jesus is doing here? He's taking away from us the possibility of spiritualizing the whole thing. So your options are just two. Either he lives, or he's dead. It happened or it didn't. If it happened, if he rose from the dead, it changes your world view. But if it's just a comfortable story to you, that's a sure sign that you've spiritualized the message, or you really haven't thought it through.

The message of Easter is, right now, Jesus has flesh and bones and is alive. That has a number of implications.

First, if Jesus has flesh and bones it must mean he is who he says he is, God's Son, for only God can rise from the dead like that. He wasn't resuscitated. No, he rose from that dead, as he promised he would. If Jesus has flesh and bones, the search for God is over. Repent of that. Jesus is not just pointing the way to heaven. He is the Way. He doesn't just claim to know the vital truths. He is the Truth.

Of course, people don't like being pressured like that. Here's one reason why: so long as you're still searching for God, then you're not really accountable to God. You get to be your own lord. This is also why many are motivated to spiritualize Easter. So long as it's only his teachings that live on, (and not the person), well then you don't really have to worry about him looking over your shoulder, do you? You don't have to worry about him disapproving of your intemperate love of worldly goods, or your dishonesty in daily life. If it's only his teaching that lives on, you don't have to worry about your self-indulgent appetites, your general indifference to the needs of others, your uncharitable thoughts toward others. If I'm still seeking God, then I don't have to tithe or attend meetings, and I cannot be sure of what God commands me to do or not do. In fact, I can live pretty much the way I want to. I get to be my own lord.

However, if Jesus has flesh and bones today, then he holds the keys to death and to life. Then the only way you're going to get to heaven is through him. That's why the biblical record goes out of its way to make sure we know it wasn't just a ghost or vision. Our text says the women took hold of his feet and worshipped him. This is why Jesus told Thomas, "Go ahead. Touch me here. Put your hand in my side and see for yourself." That's why Jesus told his disciples, "Look at me. A spirit doesn't have flesh and bones as you see I have." That's why he ate a piece of broiled fish before their eyes.

Have you ever wondered why Luke included the word "broiled"? Was that detail really necessary? Probably not. But Luke has taken on the role of a reporter, and when

you report something, details are important. It's as if Luke is saying, "Do with this as you will. I know this is an outrageous claim. But what do you want me to do? He was as dead as dead can be, but now alive. I saw him, heard him, touched him. For heaven's sake, I even watched him eat broiled fish. This was no vision or dream and he's no ghost."

Easter is not about the circle of life, nor is it about his teaching and spirit living on. No, the Gospel writers are claiming he rose from the dead. It's as if they're saying, "We saw him, touched him, and heard him. You can call us liars, or you can believe us and get into a whole new world, but don't you dare dumb this thing down. Don't you dare spiritualize this. Don't you dare do a frontal lobotomy on this. Call us liars, persecute and kill us, or believe us and come into a whole new world. But we will not give you the option of saying his teachings live on. We have seen the Living One, and he holds the keys of death and life."

So if Jesus has flesh and bones, the first implication is that he is Lord. The second implication is he has defeated sin and death. He has won the victory over death. It means he's pulled the teeth out of the mouth of death and broke the hands of death. It means he is the death of death. If Jesus hadn't rose, death would still be his master. But he has risen, and is master over death. His resurrection also confirms that he speaks the truth, and the truth is Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us. The truth is he came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. The truth is, you belonged to sin and death and the devil. By all rights, they owned you lock, stock and barrel, for Jesus said, "everyone who sins is a slave to sin. But if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

If Jesus has flesh and bones, 1) he is Lord, 2) he is Savior, and 3) your future is a physical future. Jesus Christ did not redeem us away from the physical world. That's what the Greeks thought. "Spirit is good. Matter is bad. When you die, you're finally released from the flesh that imprisons you and you'll be a very happy spirit." We're still

afflicted with that mindset. Those little memorial cards from the funeral homes often have really sappy poems on the back where it says something like, “Don’t weep for me. I’ve finally been set free.”

Rubbish! That’s not our goal, to be set free from the flesh. Death is still the last enemy. Our goal is to receive new bodies in paradise. That is, the death of Christ was not just for your spirits but also for your bodies. Easter says Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection, and then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back (1 Cor. 15:23).

You see, God loves physical matter. He created it, carefully, beautifully. Study any part of creation and you’ll see the care and attention he brought to it. He called it “very good.” And when the world was in trouble because of sin, he came down to the world to redeem the world. He became flesh and bones in order to redeem flesh and bones. Flesh and bones must not be all that bad if Jesus became it. And he promises your going to have a body in heaven! It’s no trouble for God. He already gave you one; he can give you another. Real feet will walk on real soil, and you will eat and drink and hug and dance, which brings us to the fourth implication.

If Jesus has flesh and bones, you can live this life without any regrets. Let me explain.

There are people in Watertown who are frantic. They have the sneaking suspicion they’re missing out on life. They know life is short and their budget is limited and they’re just feeling stuck here, like life is slipping between their fingers. They’re worried they’re missing out . . . on great vacations, great experiences, great sex, great food, great music. It’s one reason why the allure of drugs is so strong. As expensive as drugs are, they are still cheaper than skiing the Alps, or snorkeling the Great Barrier Reef, or going to a Wolfgang Puck restaurant.

People are afraid they’re missing out on life. You only go around once in life, so you have to seize it (is the mentality), milk that cow for all her worth. And so people

really try, but it's never quite enough. The satisfaction is fleeting, but the bills are not.

Easter says, don't be ridiculous. Easter says that in Christ, you will miss out on nothing. Relax, because you're going to live forever in the New Creation. You don't have to focus on your own happiness. Easter says you can make sacrifices as Jesus did. You can give yourself away, your time, your energy, your talents. You can give your money away. You can put the needs of others ahead of your own, and you still won't miss a thing.

The world says, "eat, drink and be merry because tomorrow you die." Easter says, relax, because you're not going to miss anything. Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full."

Proverbs 8 speaks of God frolicking in his creation. He delighted in it. He loved it. It was very good! Though creation today is not like it was, still there are faint remnants and reflections of the pleasure God was having when he created the world. These physical pleasures are so strong that even today they can be too much for us, they can overwhelm us. C.S. Lewis asks, "but what would it be like to taste at the *fountainhead* the stream of which even these lower regions prove so intoxicating . . . yet that is what lies ahead!" What he's saying is the best meal to be found in Paris or Rome is black beans and rice compared to the wedding feast of the Lamb. The best wine in Napa is bilge water compared to the wine in heaven. The greatest sex here is nothing like the perfect fellowship and communion we'll experience together in Jesus Christ. The colors here are dull and lifeless and gray compared to the colors in heaven. Relax. You're not going to miss anything!

This last month, the newspapers had many pictures of basketball players soaring through the air, as if defying gravity. It can make you sad, because you can't do that. But know this: by the time those guys are forty they've been defying gravity so long that they're hobbling around on arthritic knees, torn ligaments, chunks of cartilage floating around. Similarly gymnasts and ballerinas have very short

professional careers, and rock stars should have very short professional careers. But when Jesus comes back the Bible says even the trees will dance (they're such wall flowers now, right?) and the mountains will burst into singing. You'll miss out on nothing. You will soar on wings like eagles; you will run and not grow weary (Is. 40:31).

When's the last time you've sprinted without growing weary? I remember the last time I sprinted. It was a couple of years ago. I was racing my son to a sign post about a hundred yards away. Days later my legs were still telling me, "don't you ever do that again."

We look at pictures from years ago and some of them make you smile, but they can also make you sad because they remind you that you don't look like that anymore. Oh to be young and beautiful again, right?! Relax. Even when you are at your prime on earth, you're a shriveled vegetable compared to the new and glorious body God will recreate for you. Our future is a physical future. You're ear drums will hear real music, your retinas will take in the new creation, your taste buds will savor real food, magic in the mouth. Because of Easter, when you die, you won't want to come back. "All is gain; nothing lost."

Finally, Easter means this world is incredibly important, this world is worth fighting for. Easter means God hasn't forsaken this world, nor should you. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . ." Pollution matters to God. Disappearing species matter to God. People having no faith . . . that matters to God. Children living in poverty matter to God. Injustice matters to God.

If Jesus has flesh and bones, on the one hand you can relax, on the other hand there's work to do, because this world matters to God, and so it should matter also to God's people. It's one of the reasons why the message of Easter can be terrifying, because if it's true, it means a challenging new life style.

So, in summary, if Jesus has flesh and bones, 1), he is your Lord. 2), he's your Savior. 3), your future is a physical future. 4), you can live this life without regrets. And 5),

there's work to do, because this world matters to God.

I'm here to tell you Jesus has flesh and bones. Amen.

Christ is Risen!