

Breakfast in Galilee

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

1st in a three-part series

April 24, 2022

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John 20:19–29 (NIV)

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

John 21:1–14 (NIV)

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they answered.

⁶ He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

The true story

There are various resurrection accounts in the gospels. They are neither systematic nor neatly arranged. The writers simply tell us what happened, what they disciples saw and heard, with no attempt at any theoretical frameworks as to what

happened. Here it is, they say. He walked, he ate, he cooked, he appeared inside locked rooms and so on. Jesus was resurrected. That's the story, the true story.

The truth of doubt

Yes, Thomas had doubts. Poor guy got the label “Doubting Thomas.” Big deal. We all have doubts. We are doubt-producing machines. And like Thomas, our doubts are reasonable. Think about it. We claim that 2,000 years ago a Galilean Jew died and was then resurrected to a newly embodied life. Not a ghost. Not resuscitated. But living anew, bodily, on the other side of death, never to look back. And we even claim that the same will be true for us all one day.

Belief and Faith

We translate the Greek word, *pistis*, as “faith.” Regrettably, though *pistis* has a verb form, “faith” does not. No one says, “I faithed yesterday.” This is too bad, because Bible translations use “believe” as the verb form of “faith,” even though “believe” speaks to a state of mind, including an opinion. Similarly, “doubt” refers to a state of mind. But the best synonym for “faith” is “trust.” Faith speaks more to matters of the heart than does belief. It is not so much, “What do you think?,” as it is “Whom do you trust?” Doubt is a “head” word,” but “faith” is a heart word.

As hard as it might seem to believe such claims, when it comes to spiritual and religious matters, it is really not so much that America is a nation of unbelievers; rather, we are a nation of *half-believers*, carrying around vague notions of our deeply felt spiritual hunger. Sometimes we believe more than we would like to admit. At other times, we prefer to deny any beliefs at all. One need only turn on the television or pick up the daily newspaper to find Americans awash in attempts to make sense of their spiritual desires. We are a nation in which a majority still self-identify as Christian, though many are really more “Christian-ish” than anything else, as shown in rigorous studies of Christianity in America.

In part, I think this is because we live in a world that values scientific knowledge as the only “real” knowledge, rather than embracing science as *a* way of knowing, but not the only way. Too many

people expect “proof” if they are to overcome their doubts. But outside of mathematics, I can't really think of much that we can actually prove beyond all doubt. Science, the source of most of what we consider proven knowledge, is not really about proving anything. One of the things drummed into me in my Ph.D. work was the notion that a scientific hypothesis is never proven, only that many hypotheses have yet to be disproved. Modern science works because the visible universe is orderly and predictable, not because science proves things.

And so, with Thomas, we stand there before Jesus. Believe or not? Perhaps we are like the father of a young boy who cries out to Jesus, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

A week before Thomas had scoffed at the idea of a resurrected Jesus, saying he'd have to touch the wounds for himself in order to believe (John 20:25). Now, he can touch the wounds for himself. Now he *knows* as well as he can ever know. And his response is all it could ever be: “My Lord and my God!”

But even that would not be the end of the disciples' doubts. In one of the most perplexing moments in Scripture, Matthew tells us that Jesus met his disciples on a mountain in Galilee, from which he would return to his Father. He had been resurrected about six weeks before and had been with them numerous times since. Now, at this last meeting, Matthew tells us that, “When they saw him, they worshipped him *but some doubted*.” What!! Some doubted?? How could that be? All the times they had been with him after his resurrection and yet some still doubted. What did they actually doubt? Matthew doesn't say. I guess it is enough to grasp that doubt is simply our way and must be vigilantly confronted.

God's Vindication of Jesus

It would be a mistake to see Jesus' resurrection as merely the greatest of all miracles. The resurrection of Jesus was much more than a demonstration of God's power. The resurrection was God's vindication of Jesus.

On Friday afternoon, Jesus hung upon a Roman cross, a failed Messiah condemned as a traitor to Rome. To all appearances, Jesus' life and ministry had met an ignoble end. He was despised and rejected and the world "held him of no account" (Isaiah 53:3).

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to vindicate someone is to demonstrate that the person is "free of blame, criticism, or doubt." Jesus' crucifixion seemed to dash all hope that this man had been Israel's Messiah. As far as the Jews were concerned, there could simply be no such thing as a crucified Messiah.

However, Jesus' resurrection, this defeat of death, was a mind-blowing demonstration that the crucifixion was not all it had seemed. Rather than marking Jesus' failure, the cross was actually the place of God's victory over sin and death. Jesus had not been found guilty in God's law court, he had been found innocent! And, because Jesus stands before God in our place, we too are vindicated, standing before God as forgiven, blameless people.

Yet another story of the resurrected Jesus

What must the disciples have been thinking in those first weeks after Jesus' resurrection, as they head up to Galilee to tend to their affairs, to resume something of their former lives. Was Jesus resuscitated like Lazarus, and thus, would return to his old life, grow old, and then die a second time? No, Jesus is going to return to the Father; he told Mary Magdalene exactly that. Whatever that means, it surely isn't just going back to things as they were.

Ok, then, is he a ghost, a spirit of some kind? No, the Greeks had a word for that, *phantasma*, and it is never used in regard to the resurrected Jesus. Sure, the disciples had thought they were seeing a ghost, a *phantasma*, when they saw Jesus walking across the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:26), but they were wrong. He wasn't a ghost and then, and he isn't a ghost now that he has been resurrected (see Luke 24).

One morning in the weeks after Jesus' resurrection, Peter and some of the others head out for some morning fishing. After a while, they hear someone calling to them from the shore, telling them to try dropping their net on the right side of the boat. Figuring they have nothing to lose, they do so. At that moment, Peter realizes that Jesus is the man on the shore, so he put his clothes on (fishermen often fished naked if the weather was good), dove into the water and swam to shore. Meanwhile, the others pulled the net into the boat. It was teeming with fish, 153¹ in all, a miraculous catch by any measure.

When Peter gets to shore, Jesus is waiting. He is no ghost. He is no spirit. He has flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). He is a resurrected Jesus, but Jesus just the same.

And as he always had, Jesus still provides for their needs. Yes, Jesus enables them to get a big haul of fish, but when they come ashore they find that Jesus doesn't need their fish, he has already had some fish cooking over an open fire.

And they all sit down to share this meal together. Though John doesn't tell us explicitly that Jesus ate fish, we know from Luke's account that Jesus ate fish in front of the disciples on the first night he came to them after his resurrection. He ate the fish that night to help them see that he was still flesh and bone (Luke 24:36-43). Perhaps not exactly the same sort of flesh and bone, but still "flesh and bone," walking, talking, touching, and eating.

I'd bet that Jesus shares the meal with his disciples that morning. He had shared all their previous meals. You might wonder whether Jesus needs to eat to sustain his resurrected

¹ Much ink has been spilled over the centuries offering various explanations for the "153." Some think it must have some numerological meaning. For me, John says "153" because that is how many fish were caught in the net and John was there to see it. There is no real point in trying to read more into it. It is a miraculous catch. Enough said.

body, as you and I eat to sustain ours. Beats me. Perhaps Jesus eats now, not to sustain himself or because he needs to, but because he wants to enjoy the full bounty of God's goodness, including God's creation. (I take this as evidence that in the fullness of the kingdom of God, I'll be able to enjoy all the food I like without gaining weight.)

We picture the scene with our mind's eye, the bread and fish being passed around the fire, one disciple to another. We can't help but remember the time when Jesus fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes. Now, he feeds only a few. There is nothing miraculous or even remarkable about this meal, except for the fact that it was prepared by one who lay dead only a few weeks before.

As years pass

Twenty or so years later, Paul is writing to a Christian fellowship that he started in Corinth, Greece. They have given up their belief in Jesus' resurrection and, hence, their own. Paul can't bring them before the risen Christ to touch his wounds or meet him on a mountain, but he can offer his own testimony and that of others. Paul tells them that he, the other apostles, and more than five hundred men and women can personally attest to the resurrection of Jesus, for they saw Jesus with their own eyes. Indeed, many are still alive, he says, and could still testify to the truth of the resurrection claim.

So it was then; so it is now. We want to believe. We want to trust Jesus completely. So we confront our doubts honestly. As part of a believing community, we strive to understand the Bible and the essential Christian beliefs. We want to make some sense of it all. We put the work in. We discuss. And, all the while, we pray, "*I believe; help my unbelief.*"

How important is it that we believe in not only Jesus' resurrection, but our own?

In his *Interpretation* series commentary on 1 Corinthians 15, Richard Hays reflects on the Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead, i.e., that not only has Jesus been resurrected, but that we too shall be resurrected just as Jesus was. (A copy of his commentary on 1 Corinthians is in the St. Andrew library.)

All Christian proclamation must be grounded in the resurrection. The faith stands or falls with this, as Paul insists throughout the chapter [1 Corinthians 15]. This has several crucial implications.

First, it means above all else that the gospel is a word of radical grace, for resurrection is one thing that we can neither produce nor control nor manipulate: our hope is exclusively in God's hands.

Second, it means that the faith is based on a particular event in human history, to which a definite circle of people gave testimony; the resurrection is not simply a symbol for the flowers coming up every spring or for the hope that springs eternal in the human heart. The Christian faith is grounded in the rising from the grave of Jesus Christ, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.

Third, the foundational character of the resurrection means that eschatology is at the heart of the gospel. Because Christ is the first fruits, his resurrection points to the resurrection of all those who belong to him. That remains inescapably a future event. Thus, the effect of the resurrection of Christ is to turn our eyes to God's coming future.

Fourth, if we deny the resurrection, we will find ourselves turning inward and focusing on our own religious experience as the matter of central interest. That is what some of the Corinthians were doing, and it has also been the besetting temptation of Protestant theology since Schleiermacher. This inward turn can take the form of pietistic religion interested only in soul-saving, or it can take the form of "New Age" religion interested only in cultivating personal "spirituality." Either way it comes to much the same thing. The gospel of the resurrection of the dead, by contrast, forces us to take seriously that God is committed to the creation and that God has acted and will act in ways beyond our experience and external to our subjectivity.

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Afternoon Class

Current study: *Isaiah*

We continue our study of Isaiah.

This class will not meet on April 25.

Meeting on-line at 3pm Monday on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

Current study: **Beginning 1 Corinthians on May 3. Join us!!**

This class will not meet on April 26.

Meeting at 12:00 noon Tuesday in person in Piro Hall and on-line on Scott's Facebook ministry page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC".

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Both classes are recorded and are available each week in my podcast at scottengle.podbean.com. They are also available on Apple podcasts and elsewhere. Search by "Scott Engle Bible Studies".

Scott's Sunday Class

Meeting on Sunday at 11:00 in Smith Worship Center and on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

We are on a journey through the biblical story, *God-Is*. Each week, we will follow the sermon at 9:30 and dig a little deeper into the Scriptures for that week.

Videos of all three classes are posted on Scott's YouTube channel. Search for "Scott Engle." These videos are posted as soon as possible after class.