

Theme: It's too good to be true

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, you are marvelous in our eyes; your wonders are too great for us, but even when we acknowledge this, we doubt and we equivocate; help us acknowledge the witnesses of your son's resurrection and then help us decide what we should do with this knowledge, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

It was too good to be true. It was too good to be believed. Just because some women said Jesus was alive was just not to be believed. Dead is dead. No one can be alive after they die. It's just impossible.

It was too good to be true. It was too good to be believed. Just because Barak Obama said Osama bin Laden was dead was just not to be believed. Alive is alive. No one can be dead after they live. It's just impossible.

Last Monday night Conan O'Brien mentioned in his monologue that there are people who don't believe that Osama bin Laden was dead. O'Brien said, "They are called deathers."

In the face of overwhelming evidence there are people who refuse to believe what is presented to them. I used to work with one of these people. Even my Dad repeated what someone told him in his bar that people who worked for Lyndon Johnson killed John F. Kennedy. After all, it happened in Texas. I have also heard that the mafia killed Kennedy, along with Castro, and others. It was these kinds of things my former co-worker believed. He once said that the NBA finals are fixed to go at least six games for more money. Everything was a conspiracy.

It takes some imagination and an incredible amount cynicism to be a conspiracy theorist person. A wild story is much more credible than the truth, which is often too bland. There are still people who don't believe that people walked on the moon.

Now to start meddling, there are people who, despite overwhelming scientific evidence, believe that the earth is only 6,000 years old. Christianity was forced to adapt as our scientific knowledge grew. The earth

is not 6,000 years old. It is 4.5 billion years old. Human beings did not live with dinosaurs, which significantly are never mentioned in the Bible. You'd think something like a dinosaur would receive at least a passing comment.

But what about this resurrection thing? It is an incredible story. It is an unbelievable story. Dead is dead. There are tons of stories of people dying and after being revived have these incredible spiritual experiences they had after they died. There are way too many of these stories to be discounted.

Even in the first century and beyond, there were people who said that Jesus never died and escaped the tomb or was never a human being, so he couldn't really die anyway. Jesus, as a human being, could not have died and rose again. But all these critics knew that there were way too many witnesses who saw Jesus after the crucifixion to discount Jesus being around after that event. There must be another explanation. There must have been a conspiracy.

Even Jesus' closest friends would not believe the stories of his rise from the tomb. This is even after Jesus told them several times that he would do that very thing. It's too good to be true.

Then there's these two dejected, grieving, sad, sorry disciples going home from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Jesus is dead. Their hope in him is gone. It's time to go back to whatever they did before they followed Jesus. All hope is gone. A lot had happened in Jerusalem. They were doing what most of us do when we are trying to figure out a profound experience. They were talking it out.

They were in the midst of this conversation when Jesus sidles up along side of them. They had no clue that it was Jesus. But why should they? They knew Jesus was executed two days previously. Nobody ever expects someone who is dead to start walking along side of you. To them Jesus was a stranger.

Jesus played dumb and asked what they were talking about. Jesus' questions stopped the two travelers in their tracks. They were sad and gloomy. Their leader was dead. There are common things most people do during grief. There are also grieving actions people do that are unique or nearly unique. To be asked by Jesus what they were talking about was like Rip Van Winkle

trying to join a conversation. There were no newspapers, no radio, no TV, no internet, no Facebook. But a crucifixion in Jerusalem was a big deal. Everyone must know something about it!

One of the two travelers was named Cleopas. We never learn the name of the other person. Thinking Jesus must of just come out from under a rock (which in a sense he did), they ask him how he could be the only person in Jerusalem who did not hear of the goings on that last few days. Jesus continues to play dumb, “What do you mean?”

They explain to Jesus about this person named Jesus of Nazareth, who was a great and powerful prophet, who was well received by the people and by God. Then the chief priests and other leaders handed him over to the Romans, who crucified him. They had hoped that Jesus would be the one set Israel free. It is now the third day since all of that happened.

These two disciples in a very brief time summarized Jesus’ ministry. If someone asks you why you are a Christian, you could do worse than to repeat what these two say about Jesus. Though, I would leave out the part about setting Israel free, leading a revolt against the Romans. These two had not moved beyond the common hope that Jesus’ disciples had – a Jesus led revolutionary movement. Jesus was a revolutionary. Only his revolution was a spiritual one, not a military one.

But something strange happened. Women went to his tomb that morning and found it empty. This is really surprising! They said that they saw a vision of angels who told them that Jesus was alive. So some of the men went to the tomb and also found it empty. They, too, did not see Jesus.

Jesus upbraids them for their lack of understanding scripture. You know, if someone tells you what some part of scripture really means, question everything they say. New Testament scholar and former Bishop of Durham, N. T. Wright, says that about 65% of an English Bible is merely guess work by a translator. Greek and Hebrew are not English and many words and phrases just don’t translate into English. Jesus has the advantage here of knowing Hebrew. But like most people, Jesus picks and chooses what parts of scripture applies to him and ignores the rest.

As they reached Emmaus, Jesus seemed intent to continue on. They begged him to stay with them, because the sun was going down. It was not safe to travel at night. They offered Jesus hospitality. Jesus agreed to stay with them. When they sat down to eat, Jesus took the bread, said a blessing, broke the bread, and then gave them the bread. In that instant, they recognized Jesus and then Jesus vanished.

Now things begin to fall into place in their minds. They agreed that their hearts were on fire when Jesus explained the scriptures to them. So they decided to leave home, brave the road in the dark, and head back to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they found the place where the disciples were gathered. They were then told that Jesus had appeared to Peter. The two from Emmaus then told their story of meeting Jesus on the road and how it was that they recognized him in the breaking of the bread.

Jesus leaves these two disciples free to continue without him. His love for us is such that we are always free to turn our backs to him, bolt our minds shut in fear of what inviting him in might involve. What we do next is up to us. These two could not keep this experience to themselves. They had to share it and they had to share it now!

By word and sacrament, Christ opens the eyes of them who rejoice that they have reached their destination in him. Christ's church has been making diligent use of his given means of grace since that evening of the first day of the week, in hopes that, on the way home, perhaps two in a crowd might even say, one to another, "Did not our hearts burn this morning as the scriptures were opened to us!"

Text: **Luke 24:13–35** (NRSV)

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^f from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.^g ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹ He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of

^f Gk *sixty stadia*; other ancient authorities read *a hundred sixty stadia*

^g Other ancient authorities read *walk along, looking sad?*"

Nazareth,^h who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.ⁱ Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning,²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”²⁵ Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah^j should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on.²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them.³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.³² They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us^k while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.³⁴ They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!”³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.¹

^h Other ancient authorities read *Jesus the Nazorean*

ⁱ Or *to set Israel free*

^j Or *the Christ*

^k Other ancient authorities lack *within us*

¹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Lk 24:13–35). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.