



Week 11: The Appearances of the Risen Christ and the Ascension

Read Luke 24:13-35

This lesson is about three things:

1. a chronology of the appearances of Christ in each of the three gospels;
2. the Ascension of Jesus Christ;
3. a more significant look at the Walk to Emmaus.

Review

At the end of this study, there is a reprint of the review from lesson eight, along with a review of the remainder of the study. Sometime during the week, take a minute to review it to help you take hold of the whole Journey to Jerusalem.

The Appearances of the Risen Christ

Take a look at the chart below (which includes John):

| Appearance | Matthew | Mark (longer ending) | Luke | John |
|------------|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | 28:9-10: Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary on Easter | 16:9-11: Jesus appears to Mary on the road on Easter | | 20:11-18: Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene outside the tomb |
| 2 | | 16:12-13: Jesus appears to two as they were walking "in the country" | 24:13-35: Jesus appears to two on the road to Emmaus | |
| ? | | | 24:34: The disciples report Jesus has appeared to Simon | |

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|---|---|---|--|--|
| 3 | 28:16-20: Jesus appears to the disciples on the mountain in Galilee, and commissions them | 16:14-18: Jesus appears to the disciples while they are "at table" and chastises them and then commissions them | 24:36-49: Jesus appears to the disciples in Jerusalem, showed his hands and feet, and ate fish, and commissions them, but tells them to wait in the city until they are clothed with power from on high. | 20:19-23: Jesus appears to the disciples (without Thomas) in the upper room, commissions them, breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit. |
| | | 16:19: Jesus ascends into heaven | 24:50-53: Jesus ascends into heaven | |
| 4 | | | | 20:26-29: A week later, Jesus appears to Thomas, who puts hands in holes and feet. |
| 5 | | | | 21:1-19: Jesus appears to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee while they are fishing. They cook and eat a breakfast of fish, and Jesus restores Peter, and they have a conversation about the "the disciple whom Jesus loved. (John) |
| ? | | | Acts 1:3-4: Report of Jesus appearing to them for forty days in Jerusalem, and "staying with them" | |
| ? | | | Acts 1:6-11: Another description of the ascension, with a prediction of his return, and a command to "be witnesses." | |

Note the following about these appearances:

- 1) Remember that Matthew and Mark point to the disciples going immediately to Galilee, whereas Luke (and John) keep them in Jerusalem for a period after the resurrection.
- 2) Between the three of them, Matthew, Mark, and Luke record three appearances of Jesus, although they differ a bit in specific detail.
 - a) an appearance to Mary(s) (Matthew and Mark)
 - b) an appearance to two on the road (Mark and Luke)
 - c) an appearance to all the disciples, recognizing their doubt, and with some sort of commissioning
- 3) Luke adds a possible appearance to Simon Peter, although it is not recorded. Luke 24:33-34: *That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!"* Remember that Luke was written after the letters of Paul, and we find in 1 Corinthians 15:4-5: *...that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve.*
- 4) John adds two more appearances: to Thomas and while fishing.
- 5) Acts, the second volume of Luke, seems to imply more appearances during the period of waiting in Jerusalem. This would be consistent with 1 Corinthians 15:6: *After that, He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.*
- 6) These appearances seem to have three purposes:
 - a) to recognize and address the fear and doubt of the disciples and surely of the gospel hearers and readers. The responses seem to range from chastising (Mark's second ending) to providing evidence and reassurance to the disciples.
 - b) to demonstrate that Jesus is bodily resurrected. In Matthew, the Marys clasp Jesus' feet. In Luke, he offers both of his hands for touching and he eats fish with the disciples.
 - c) to commission the disciples to go into the world and proclaim the good news. Mark's second ending includes in that commissioning the power to perform signs: *And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.*" (Mark 16:17-18)

The Walk to Emmaus

Only Luke records this story, although the second ending of Mark makes mention of Jesus appearing to two people while they were walking in the country. (Remember, the Gospel of Mark has them in Galilee, rather than Judea.) Let's take a look at it together:

Luke 24:13-16: Two disciples are walking on a road toward a village called Emmaus. This is on the road to Joppa (Remember Jonah won't go to Ninevah, so he runs away to Joppa. Are they running away from Jerusalem?) One of the two Emmaus disciples was a man named Cleopas; we do not know the identity of the other. Perhaps they are from Emmaus, and are simply returning home after the Passover.

The idea of a road, a path, or a journey is really an important concept in Luke. Remember we said that the Gospel of Luke begins Jesus' journey to Jerusalem much earlier than do the other gospel writers. In Luke 10, the Good Samaritan rescues the traveler on the road. In Luke 15, the prodigal son comes home and the father runs down the road to meet him. In Acts, Luke describes the disciples as "followers of the way." Luke clearly thinks of you and me on a journey, and along the way, we encounter the risen Christ. The question is whether or not we will recognize him.

Luke 24:17-27: Many scholars believe that the Emmaus road story is told in a way to mirror an Easter season worship experience. By the time this gospel is circulating, the idea of worship as Word and Table has become ingrained in the early church. There are some key parts to worship:

The first key component of worship is **the Word**. Worship consists of hearing and discussing the "kerygma" of the gospel. Kerygma is a Greek word meaning "kernel" or "essence." Here, the disciples are in conversation about the story itself. The word that is used for "discussing" implies a certain passion, and could be translated "debating." "Two of them... were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing..." (vv 14-15). When they meet the stranger, the two followers of Jesus tell the first part of the story of Jesus' life and work, and then this stranger on the road, later found to be Jesus himself, finishes the story. Nonetheless, they do not understand. In verse 32, the Gospel of Luke reinforces the importance of the Word when it says, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening up the scriptures to us?" Indeed, that is what worship is supposed to do: to break open the Scriptures for us.

Luke 24:28-29: The two of them long for Jesus to stay with them, and urge him strongly to do so. It is following that request that Jesus is revealed to the disciples. The risen Christ will never force himself into our lives; rather, he will become real to us only by our invitation and urging.

Luke 24:30: Discussion of the Word is followed by **the Table**. There is no question that this passage looks back to the feeding of the 5,000, as well as to the Last Supper. The basic pattern of taking, blessing, breaking, giving is repeated. It is the core of the service of the Lord's Supper. It is the essence of the Christian life. God takes us, blesses us, breaks us, and gives us away to the world as servants.

Note also the importance of **remembrance** in both Word and Table. The disciples are remembering together all the things that had happened, and recall the whole story to share with Jesus. The disciples understand by remembrance; having experienced Jesus at the table, they recall the extraordinary nature of the time with him on the road. Memory here plays a central role in their understanding, which can speak to Christ's call for our remembrance during the sacrament of Holy Communion. There are many occasions in scripture that remind us that after the resurrection the disciples remembered Jesus' words and understood them.

Luke 24:31-32: The disciples eyes are opened in that moment; he is "made known" to them in the breaking of the bread (verse 35). The presence of Christ comes by revelation. It is the marvelous partnership of God's divine action and our human freedom. Fred Craddock notes that Jesus never chooses to reveal himself to strangers on the street – only to disciples. He never forces himself on us, but neither can we come to know him on our own. It is much like Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8: *For it is by grace you are saved, through faith.*

Luke 24:33-35: The disciples get up and immediately return to Jerusalem to share their story, to proclaim the witness. This is important for a number of reasons.

- They must share the good news out of their natural excitement of recognizing Jesus, moving from despair to hope again.
- The return to Jerusalem joins the experience of the two disciples to that of the different encounters of the other eleven, thus understanding the appearances as one experience. This will be very important in the opening of Acts, for the church after Jesus will begin with all the disciples together and making common witness (Acts 2:14)
- Returning to Jerusalem to report is vital in Luke's understanding of the Church. Jerusalem is the center of the Christians' authority in the Christian fellowship.

Our experience of the risen Christ, the opening of eyes and the burning of hearts, always inspires a response, perhaps first to Jesus himself, but more profoundly to the world around us. Worship and Witness, Presence and Proclamation are always tied together. There is an Easter liturgy, drawn from the early church, which is still often practiced today. The leader begins: "Christ is Risen!" and the people respond, "He is Risen indeed!" You see the origin of that liturgy in the Emmaus story. It is a liturgy of our common witness to the world.

So in this story we find a powerful message about what authentic worship looks like:

- 1) There is a desire to have the presence of the Risen Christ with us.
- 2) We remember what Christ has done for us, and experience together the kerygma of the gospel message.
- 3) We pray that God would break open the Scriptures for us, and that our hearts would burn within us for that revelation.
- 4) We encounter the Risen Christ at the table of the Lord.
- 5) We "get up" and return to our worlds to witness, to tell others.

The Ascension

The ascension is not the same thing as the resurrection. Because the ascension has seen little attention since the Enlightenment, many Christians confuse the two events. However, they are not the same event, and in some ways, the ascension is essential if we are to understand the impact of Jesus' resurrection on the church today. The ascension, in which Jesus is taken up into heaven, occurs only very briefly in the second ending of Mark and in Luke. However, there is a bit of confusion, because in Luke, Jesus blesses the disciples and ascends into heaven on Easter night. In Luke's second volume, The Acts of the Apostles, it appears that the Ascension is forty days after Easter, with Jesus continuing to appear to his disciples during those forty days. Most scholars explain this by pointing to Luke 24 as a single unit to be used for worship on Easter. Therefore, as they wanted to get the whole story in, it was added into the narrative on that day. Others simply note that some later manuscripts leave it out of Luke 24 altogether, and turn to the passage in Acts 1:6-11.

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he

was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

The importance of the ascension might be condensed into the following:

- 1) Jesus will not be appearing to the disciples or anyone else anymore. He has been bodily taken away. However, the Holy Spirit will be coming... Remember, Luke is the gospel in which the focus on the Holy Spirit is strongest. Matthew doesn't speak of the ascension directly, and his perspective seems to be that Jesus remains with us, along with the Holy Spirit's presence.
- 2) In Luke, there remains a distinction between the bodily resurrected Jesus and the Holy Spirit, who is the “God with us” for the here and now.
- 3) Jesus is present in the realm of heaven even now where he continues to sit at the right hand of God, and reign over both heaven and earth, although his kingdom is not yet fulfilled on earth.
- 4) We await the coming of the King in power, when heaven and earth are joined and the Kingdom of God (heaven) overcomes the kingdom of earth.

So one could simplify (perhaps oversimplify) the gospel message as follows:

- **Birth and Life:** Jesus' kingdom is inaugurated in his birth and life, and we see signs of it popping up all around, in healings, cleansings, the defeat of evil powers, miracles, and parables. The kingdom of the world is upset and disrupted by his presence.
- **Crucifixion:** Jesus is crucified, and through that crucifixion, his kingdom is firmly established and death and sin are ultimately defeated. Just as the Passover set the journey into Canaan in motion, so the crucifixion sets us free from sin and death, and sets the journey to God's kingdom in motion. But just as the Israelites were not yet in Canaan, neither are we living fully in God's established kingdom.
- **Resurrection:** Jesus is raised from the dead, to demonstrate that no evil can stop this coming kingdom, not even death.
- **Ascension:** Jesus ascends into heaven, and we experience his bodily presence no more.
- **Pentecost:** We are given the Holy Spirit that we might serve as witnesses to the reign of Christ in heaven and on earth, and what the Kingdom of Heaven looks like in our midst.
- **The Return:** We watch with hope for the coming of the king in final glory, and the fulfillment of that kingdom.

Questions for Conversation and Reflection

1. What took place immediately before and after this week's text?
2. What was the mood of the disciples as they walked along the road? How would you characterize the one disciple's response to Jesus' question?
3. What do you think is implied in the reaction of the disciples in verse 24, when they heard that the tomb was empty?
4. How does Jesus introduce himself to the disciples on the road?

5. How does Jesus come to have dinner with them?
6. At what point did the group recognize Jesus for who he really was?
7. Have you ever been riddled with “fear and doubt?” How, if at all, has God revealed God’s self to you to recognize and address those fears and doubts?
8. What experiences have you had that break open the Scriptures, or make your “heart burn within you”?
9. In what way does “remembrance” play a role in your own spiritual life and worship?
10. Can you describe a time in which it felt like your eyes were opened?
11. In what way do you, or might you, witness to a Jesus Christ who is Risen?
12. If you are on your own spiritual journey to Jerusalem, how would you describe that journey and your progress? What specific milestones would you note?
13. What are one or two things you want to make sure you remember as you move from this study?

Journey to Jerusalem Review

- The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called “the synoptic gospels” because they all follow the same basic story of Jesus’ life, with some variations. The Gospel of John has a very different sequence. The word gospel means “good news.”
- The Gospel of Mark is the shortest gospel, with a focus on faithfulness in the face of persecution, on the healings and miracles of Jesus, and with a great sense of urgency, using the word “immediately” often. It was probably written by a traveling companion of Paul, right about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.
- The Gospel of Matthew is the Jewish Gospel, and it was probably written 80-90 AD in Syria of Antioch, where a large contingent of Jewish refugees had fled after the destruction of Jerusalem. Its purpose is to show Jews that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, and that Christianity is really the true Judaism. It most often uses the phrase “this is to fulfill the prophecy...” It also points to the Kingdom of Heaven as beginning to come to pass, and that the Kingdom of Heaven is overtaking the kingdom of the world.
- The Gospel of Luke is the first of a two-volume set – Luke and Acts. It has a focus on Jesus for the whole world, especially focused on Gentiles, outcasts, the powerless, and the poor, as well as the responsibility of the rich. It also emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit, and the sense of joy in following Jesus.
- Jesus begins his ministry when he is about 30 years old and is baptized by his cousin, John the Baptist. He is anointed by the Holy Spirit and his identity is established as God’s beloved son. He is then led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted, tested, and tempered by the Devil.
- Jesus goes to Capernaum, where he performs his first healing in the Synagogue. He then goes to Nazareth, his hometown, where he is rejected by his own people.
- Jesus teaches and heals and cleanses lepers throughout Galilee, using Capernaum as his home base. His healings are not designed to convince people he is the Messiah, but rather to demonstrate his compassion and the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven/God as being the presence of health, wholeness, justice, righteousness, and peace. His parables are not designed to convince people to follow him, but to show the difference between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, and could be understood through the eyes of faith.
- Galilee was a hotbed of Jewish resistance. Throughout this time, the tensions began to rise with the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the Herodians. Periodically, he goes to “the other side” of the Sea of Galilee, Gentile territory, but also the territory of Herod Philip.
- Sometime near the beginning of his third year of ministry, when he hears of the death of John the Baptist, Jesus takes his disciples and leaves the country of Herod Antipas, going first to Tyre and Sidon, and then to Caesarea Philippi.
- In Caesarea Philippi, Jesus begins to be very clear about his coming death and resurrection. Because Peter proclaims him as the Messiah, and the disciples appear to be finally beginning to understand, Jesus authorizes his church to carry on after his death, and reminds them of their nature as servants rather than masters.

- He leaves Caesarea, and goes with Peter, James, and John up onto a mountain, where he is transfigured before them, a foretaste of his being “glorified.” The word “glory” really means “shine” or “glow.” Both Jesus and his disciples are reminded of his identity as the beloved Son of God.
- Jesus, James, John, and Simon Peter come down the mountain and on his way south to Jerusalem, Jesus reminds the disciples two more times that he is to suffer, die, and rise again. Each time, he reminds them of their roles as servants. The healing of blind Bartimaeus as he reaches Jericho, which is in Judea about 16 miles from Jerusalem, is a demonstration of such servanthood, as Jesus asks him “what do you want me to do for you?”
- Holy Week Sunday: Jesus comes from Jericho to Bethany and Bethphage, two of the daughters (suburbs) of Jerusalem. He rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, consistent with the prophecy of Zechariah. Hosanna means “save us” or “salvation,” and the palm branches are a sign of Jewish Kings before the Romans. He stops on the way and predicts the destruction of Jerusalem. He goes into Jerusalem and looks around.
- Holy Week Monday: Jesus curses a fig tree, a symbol of the temple, because it has leaves but no fruit. He cleanses the temple, confronting the economic system of exploitation of people by religious authorities, and the sacrificial system, pointing to himself as the sacrifice that eliminates the need for any more sacrifices. He quotes prophecies that point to the importance of justice and righteousness.
- Holy Week Tuesday – Wednesday: Jesus teaches in the temple all day, with increasingly controversial teachings, aimed at all segments of the power structure of Israel. At night he goes out of the city to stay in Bethany. On Wednesday night on Mt. Olivet, he speaks in apocalyptic language about the coming battle of good and evil and of his return. On this night, Judas makes a deal with the chief priests to betray Jesus, and a woman anoints him with oil “for his burial.”
- Holy Week Thursday (Maundy Thursday): The disciples prepare for the Passover, which meant they would have found a place in the city, purchased a goat, and taken it for sacrifice with the blood poured on the altar. They celebrate the Passover meal together, and Jesus reinterprets the meal to predict his own sacrifice to deliver us from slavery to sin and from death, and asks the disciples to share in the cup. He goes to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he prays, and then is arrested, betrayed by Judas with a kiss, and taken to the house of Caiaphas the high priest. He is tried and convicted of blasphemy, and Peter denies him.
- Holy Week Friday (Good Friday): Jesus is taken before Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, who sends him to King Herod, who sends him back to Pilate, who washes his hands of the execution. The chief priests lead the people to turn against Jesus, and they call for Barabbas’ release rather than that of Jesus. He is scourged, mocked, and Simon of Cyrene carries his cross to Golgotha, where he is crucified after six hours. The curtain of the temple is torn in two. He is put in the tomb of one of the Sanhedrin (ruling council), Joseph of Arimathea. Matthew says a guard is posted and the tomb sealed.
- On Sunday, the disciples find the body of Jesus gone. He appears to two Marys, to the disciples, and to two walking along a road. Mark and Matthew record the disciples going to Galilee, whereas Luke (and John) record them staying in Jerusalem. Mark probably ended with the women wondering, and nobody ever seeing Jesus after the resurrection, but a longer ending was added. The resurrection means that the Kingdom of God is happening right in that moment, and that Jesus is the way to

experience that resurrection, and to be a part of that Kingdom. Additionally, Jesus says to the thief on the cross that he will be with him in Paradise that very day because he acknowledges him as king.

- The disciples struggle with doubt and fear until Jesus appears to them. Jesus reveals himself to them by helping them remember the events, the story, the “kerygma” or essence of the story, and by revealing himself to them in bread and wine. And then he commissions them to be his witnesses in all the world. In Matthew and Mark, that is to happen immediately, but in Luke, Jesus tells them to wait for the Holy Spirit. Jesus ascends, and in Luke, promises them the Holy Spirit until he returns.



Daily Readings

Week 11: The Appearances of the Risen Christ and the Ascension

Read Luke 24:13-35

Week 11, Day 1

Luke 24:13-35

Context: The disciples understood by remembrance, having experienced Jesus at the table they recalled the extraordinary nature of the time with him on the road. Memory played a central role in their understanding which reminds us of Christ's call for our remembrance during the Sacrament of Holy Communion. There are many occasions in which scripture tells us that after the resurrection the disciples remembered Jesus' words and understood them.

Reflection Question: When was a time that you did not comprehend the meaning of something until reflecting on its truth sometime later?

Week 11, Day 2

Mark 16:9-20

Context: The earliest manuscripts have the Gospel of Mark ending at 16:8, with an empty tomb but no physical appearance of Christ. In the history of early Christianity, several individual scribes had difficulty with the ending of Mark as it ends the story with fear and uncertainty. The longer ending was likely not added until the middle of the second century and was probably dependent on the other Gospel accounts. The original ending is more in line with the overall messianic secret theme found in Mark challenging the reader with the question, "Who do you say Jesus is?"

Reflection Question: Does your Bible make a note that this scripture was not found in the earliest manuscripts? How does this realization add or take away from your understanding of the gospel message in Mark?

Week 11, Day 3
Matthew 28:16-20

Context: This is the scene of Jesus' vindication as "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (v 18). Jesus now turns over his teaching authority to his disciples as their status as apostles is now complete. They are told that this gospel can now be carried to "all nations" and not just the house of Israel, marking the final move from the particular ministry of the Son of David to the universal witness of the Son of God.

Reflection Question: How might Christ be calling you to "make disciples of all nations?" What does sharing the life and love of Jesus with others around you look like in your day to day life?

Week 11, Day 4
Luke 24:36-49

Context: Although much briefer than the Emmaus story, verses 36-43 have essentially the same form: the risen Christ appears, the disciples do not recognize him, food is shared, they respond in wonder and joy. For Jesus it was important that the disciples saw that he was the same physical person that they called friend and Lord before the crucifixion. The one who appeared to them now was just as alive and real as he was a week ago. He was flesh and blood, not a disembodied spirit; this was highlighted by his simple question to the disciples about food.

Reflection Question: Imagine that Jesus appeared to you in person this week; what might Jesus say to you in that moment?

Week 11, Day 5
Acts 1:1-14

Context: Acts 1 can be divided into two parts: the first is a summary for Theophilus of the events that took place at the end of the Gospel of Luke, and the second is the commissioning of the apostles, with the promise of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:8 shows that Luke was quite aware of the political and religious nature of Jesus' message regarding the inauguration of the reign of God. It would reach beyond Israel to include those who had been disenfranchised from Israel's commonwealth, the Gentiles. For this reason, the inclusion of the Gentiles in the "new" people of God is an overarching concern of Acts.

Reflection Question: The scripture tells us that they gathered together and were constantly devoting themselves to prayer. What is one thing you could do?