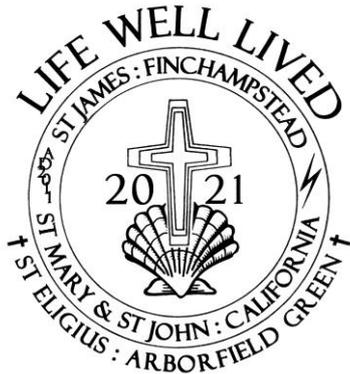


Parish of Finchampstead and California



THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

TALK 2: The GOSPELS of LUKE and JOHN; and GOSPEL SUMMARY

Luke

- For his Gospel, Luke draws on the tradition of Mark and shares some of the rest of his material with Matthew. Although separated in the Bible, Luke and Acts are a single composition in two parts.
- Luke's account of the women finding the tomb empty follows Mark (and therefore Matthew). The women are still prominent in Luke but have a less significant role: they report back to the male disciples but are not believed; except that Peter investigates the tomb and is perplexed.
- From that point Luke's account diverges from Matthew's. Luke reports two separate appearances - to two disciples on the Emmaus road, and then to the apostles gathered together. In this second incident Jesus gives the disciples their commissioning (somewhat different from Matthew's). Later, Jesus is 'taken up to heaven'.
- Prior to that final scene, everything happens on Easter day, and takes place in or around Jerusalem; there is no mention of Galilee and Acts starts in Jerusalem.
- Luke ch24 is full of references and allusions to earlier parts of his Gospel, especially (like Matthew) to the infancy narratives. In addition the Emmaus incident and the appearance to the disciples have many elements in common. And the whole post-resurrection narrative has resonances with the continuing story in Acts: Luke's frames of reference are more widely drawn than the other Gospel writers'.
- Resonances with the Infancy narratives (chs 1&2)
 - The women's **words seemed like nonsense** – cf Zechariah's reaction to God's revelation (1:18-20).
 - Jesus as the **Messiah** = Christ (on the road and with the disciples - 24:26,46) – cf 1:32, 2:11.
 - Song of Simeon seems particularly important eg **The one who was going to redeem Israel** (cf 2:34); **Forgiveness to all nations** (cf 2:32). Also Simeon's 'fall and rising' predicts the crucifixion and resurrection.
 - The centrality of the Scriptures (**Beginning with the Scriptures...**) to understanding salvation history runs in parallel with the frequent references and allusions to the OT in chs 1&2.
 - Multiple parallels between the Emmaus incident and the account of the 12 year old Jesus in the Temple (2.41-52) eg Passover, leaving Jerusalem, anxiety and loss, third day, returning to Jerusalem, recognising / finding Jesus, Jesus' authority, failure to understand, Jesus 'having to do' what God required (24:28,2:49).
- Comparison of the Emmaus incident and the appearance to the disciples
 - Similarities include Jesus' unexpected appearance; he interrupts discussion / argument and asks questions; initially he provokes sadness or fear; he teaches from

the Scriptures, and opens his hearers' minds to why 'the Messiah must suffer'; his physicality is emphasised.

- There are some differences reflecting the different contexts of the two accounts. These include: Jesus' appearance is routine or dramatic; he is mistaken for a stranger or a ghost; he is recognised late in one story, early in the other.
 - Overall the similarities are more striking and the differences serve to emphasise that Emmaus looks back to give a context for the new reality – the appearance starts from that new reality and looks forward via the Ascension to the future.
- The resurrection and the early Church in Acts
 - **Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached ... to all nations ... beginning at Jerusalem** could be a manifesto for Acts. See also specific OT prophecies eg Joel 2:32 (Acts 2:21); Isaiah 49:6 (Acts 13:47).
 - Disciples as **Witnesses** – those who had seen – an essential element of the Gospel proclamation in Acts eg 2:32,3:15,5:32,12:31.
 - **Clothed with power** = the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).
 - **Bethany** (location of Ascension) – the place where Jesus started his Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem = emphasising inter-relationship between crucifixion and resurrection, an essential element of preaching in Acts.
 - Brief Gospel account of **Ascension** sets scene for more elaborate account in Acts
 - Luke's testimony about the Resurrection
 - JESUS IS ALIVE IN THE CHURCH
 - As in Mark and Matthew Jesus predicts his resurrection (9:22, 18:33)
 - Like Matthew the Gospel is through-composed with the infancy narratives (themselves deeply rooted in the OT) pointing forward to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection
 - The Gospel is also tightly connected to Acts. In Acts the young Church started to fulfil the commission that Jesus gave the disciples
 - The women play their part but their involvement is sidelined by the disciples' dismissal of their report. Peter gets a mention but hardly in flattering terms – he still doesn't understand.
 - The Emmaus road incident seems really important for Luke. There are two parts. In the first Jesus explains the Scriptures, the travellers' hearts burn (they don't know why); their response is to invite Jesus to stay. In the second Jesus acts – he breaks bread and they recognise him. Their response, when he has disappeared, is to return to Jerusalem.
 - By the time they arrive Peter has also seen Jesus (see also 1 Corinthians 15:5), offstage as it were, but clearly not at the tomb.
 - Then Jesus himself appears – the disciples are terrified (same word as the women at the tomb) – and confronts by touch and taste any suggestion that he is a ghost
 - He teaches from the Scriptures, breathes on the disciples (recalling God's act in creation), and points to the future as it will be described in Acts before leaving them. Unlike Mark and Matthew the reader is not required to imagine what the future will be.

John

- Generally considered the last Gospel to be written; some speculation about the extent to which John knew other Gospels, particularly Luke. Uniquely the Gospel seems to have two endings.
- Read 20:31-32 and 21:24-25
- Ch 20 has three elements – Mary Magdalene (and disciples) at the tomb; and two appearances by Jesus to the disciples, first with Thomas absent, second with him there.
- Ch 21, considered by most scholars to be a later (but not much later) addition - included in the earliest and all other NTs, has the accounts of the remarkable catch of fish and of Peter's reinstatement.

- John's account of the first visits to the tomb is as elaborate as Matthew's but here it is Mary Magdalene (alone?) who is earliest. At this point, she sees only that the stone has been moved and that Jesus' body has been 'taken away'. She tells Peter and John, the beloved disciple.
- Peter and John run to the tomb and enter. John believes what he sees.
- After they have gone Mary enters the tomb and sees two angels. Then she has an encounter with the risen Jesus.
- Later on, in a scene reminiscent of Luke, Jesus appears to the disciples. He commissions them.
- A week later Thomas comes to faith.
- The accounts of the huge catch of fish might have their roots in a similar catch reported in Luke immediately after Jesus called his first disciples (Luke 5:4-10).
- Jesus' reinstatement of Peter and comments about the death of the beloved disciple may address specific issues around the time ch 21 was written.
- Not only is John's account of the post-resurrection events the most extensive of the four Gospels, but he is the only writer to attempt detailed characterisations.
- As with the other Gospels there are frequent references and allusions to themes running throughout the Gospel and especially to the Prologue (1:1-18)
- Resonances with the rest of John's Gospel
 - **PROLOGUE: Early on the first day of the week** implies a new creation in Jesus cf 'In the beginning...' (1:1) and 'In him was life ...' (1:3).
 - **While it was still dark** – cf 'the light shines in the darkness (1:4) and 'the true light' (1:9).
 - **Doors locked for fear of the Jews** – in John 'the Jews' means those who rejected Jesus' message and crucified him – as in 1:10-11.
 - **The disciples were overjoyed** – no sense of fear (contrast Luke) or lack of belief of those present (contrast Matthew) – cf 1:12.
 - **He breathed on them** recalls God's breath on Adam (Genesis 2:27) as part of creation when God and the Word were one (1:1) – Jesus' action asserts his unity with God in the new creation.
 - **Receive the Holy Spirit** – cf 'the right to become the children of God' in 1:12-13; see also 3:1-8,7:39.
 - **My Lord and my God** – Thomas' declaration of faith summarises what 1:1-18 expounds about Jesus, the Word. It goes beyond Peter's earlier recognition of Jesus as Messiah (which John does not record).
 - **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe** – cf 1:12,18.
 - **MORE GENERALLY:** Belief is a dominant theme in John – mentioned 99 times – and reaches its positive conclusion in ch 20 (v8,25,27,29,31).
 - Similarly his emphasis on the Spirit reaches its climax in 20:21-23.
 - A further important theme, the Temple (see eg 2:19,4:20-24), makes no sense without the resurrection.
 - The fulfilment of relationships – with Mary Magdalene, the disciples, Peter and Thomas – gives substance to Jesus' frequent talk about love (eg 3:16 and the Farewell Discourses).
 - Peter is reinstated via his own expression of love and Jesus' instruction to **feed my sheep** – compare Jesus himself as the Good Shepherd in 10:11.
 - Finally in ch 21 comes the debate about the death of the beloved disciple with Peter being told not to interfere but to concentrate on following Jesus himself – cf 1:43.
- John's testimony about the Resurrection
 - JESUS IS GLORIFIED
 - Unlike the other Gospels where Jesus is explicit about his resurrection, in John he is allusive eg 2:19 (the Temple saying), 8:54 and 12:23 (glorifying), 14:28 and 16:16-22 (going and coming back).

- John is also unique in the way he develops the characters of four of the post-resurrection witnesses – Mary Magdalene, Thomas, Peter and the beloved disciple:
- The importance of Mary Magdalene is emphasised – she is the first at the tomb, the one who reports to the male disciples, the only one to see the angels, the first to see and talk to Jesus. The role of the other women is almost entirely eliminated (but see the unexpected ‘we’ in 20:2).
- Thomas plays a prominent facilitating role by providing a link between the witnesses and those who believe without seeing.
- Peter is treated more extensively than in the other Gospels. He is reinstated not only from his threefold denial but also from his failure of understanding and faith at the tomb (contrast the beloved disciple). In fact he is more than reinstated – Jesus hands him at least part of his own role as the Good Shepherd.
- The beloved disciple’s intimacy with and understanding of Jesus is stressed and provokes Peter’s questioning of Jesus and his gentle rebuke.
- Ch 20, like Luke, takes place at Jerusalem, ch 21, like Matthew, in Galilee
- Like Matthew but in contrast to Luke, the commissioning of the disciples leaves the future open. For John the climax of his Gospel seems to be his breathing on the disciples and, like God in creation, giving them the Holy Spirit. At that point his work is done and the final aspect of his glorification, his return to the Father, can take place.
- In light of all this the uncertainty around the two apparent endings seems unimportant to those who believe. Ch 21 may or may not have been written by John, but there has never been a time when ch 21 has not been regarded as part of the NT.

The Gospel accounts – similarities and differences

- Looked in detail at individual Gospels. Seen in each case consistency with rest of Gospel; with special consideration, except in Mark, of the early parts where Gospel writers are setting the tone for whole work. Because Gospels have different emphases, we would expect, and have found, differences in post-resurrection accounts. Synopsis shows how widespread they are. Differences could be taken as demonstrating integrity of writing process and truth of the essentials (no carefully constructed and consistent design). And there are many underlying similarities:
- In all four Gospel it is women, or a woman, who discover the empty tomb. They alone see the angels. In Matthew and John they encounter the risen Jesus first. All this seems critical to general authenticity of the accounts – in first century no-one would invent a story in which women played a pivotal role.
- Consistency too about the stone being rolled away and the tomb being empty.
- In all 4 Gospels there is at least one angel/messenger, in 3 of them proclaiming the resurrection.
- Peter is given prominence in all 4 narratives.
- Consistency also in what is not there – no attempt to portray the resurrection itself.
- And consistency in the absence of direct OT quotes (unexpected in light of both the frequent references in passion narratives and the importance of the firm tradition that the resurrection happened ‘according to the Scriptures’ cf 1 Corinthians 15:4).
- Consistent too is Jesus’ authority and initiative; the normality of the settings; the certainty of those who saw the risen Jesus that it was indeed him – and then would be credible witnesses to proclaim the Gospel.
- Unlike Paul (1 Corinthians 15:7), and surprising if there were any substance to the theory that the accounts have been shaped primarily to address contemporary issues in the early church, none of the accounts mentions James.

- Jesus risen is a physical being but in Luke and John with strange qualities of appearing and disappearing. He is always recognised but not necessarily immediately.
- The resurrection is not expected. Jesus' own predictions have not taken root. Even the empty tomb is inexplicable, except to the beloved disciple. This is another rough edge which argues for authenticity.
- Consistent albeit remarkable contrast with Paul is the Gospel's absolute lack of reference to the future resurrection of believers – Jesus the 'firstfruits'.
- Out of all the convergences, and the discrepancies of detail that surround them, what conclusions might we draw?
 - The accounts are not fiction, nor (in spite of much scholarly effort in this direction) are they attempts to justify things that happened in the first century church.
 - They show Jesus as having been raised bodily, not as a spirit, and even less as an impression in the minds of the witnesses.
 - The discrepancies demonstrate the desire of the Gospel-writers to conform the material of the tradition they received to the theological perspective of their own Gospel.
 - And the differences as much as the similarities speak to the Gospels' integrity and honesty.
 - The strangeness of some of the events reflects the unprecedented and unrepeatable nature of what they describe.
 - Subsequent history shows that the reality of the resurrection to the first disciples overwhelmed the disastrous effects of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion.
 - These same disciples were transformed from scared followers to intrepid leaders of the way of Jesus Christ.