



February 26, 2012
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*the One with all the questions:
What Are You Afraid Of?
Luke 24: 36-49*

"What are you afraid of?" That's the question of the morning. This fall, Diane and I were working on painting the house. We decided together that I would take all the high spots, because she is afraid of heights. So I borrowed a 24 foot ladder, extended it as far it would go, and climbed up to the highest peak of our house, and started painting... and let me just confess it now, I am afraid of heights too. I mean that is some scary stuff! Imagine it: You're climbing up with paint supplies in hand, while the ladder is bouncing around. Then, since it's a nice day, the kids are out playing around. So you're up there all tense because you could fall to your death at any moment, and then your passionate son comes screaming around the corner on his scooter going right under the ladder... That is some scary stuff!

What are you afraid of? Is it heights? Is it spiders? Is it public speaking? I did some research on the most common fears we have; those I just mentioned were on most of the lists, but still there was no consensus. I'm interested in learning what you think, so turn to your neighbor and spend one minute describing one of your fears. Ready? Go!

Let's hear some of your examples. If you don't want to confess your own fear, you can simply spill the beans on the person who spoke with you.

Did anyone say that their biggest fear was seeing a ghost? No? That's not surprising; most of us don't believe in ghosts. But, if the first disciples of Jesus were here, they may have listed this as one of their top 10 as we'll see in our scripture this morning. Go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Luke 24:36-49. We're finishing our series this morning called "The ONE with All the Questions." We've been looking at the questions Jesus asks and considering how they can help us better understand how to share the love and hope of Jesus with others. In this morning's text there is a question from Jesus that is so important for each of us to answer. Whether you are a person who is just exploring who Jesus is or you are already a follower of Jesus, I think it is so important to get in touch with your answer to this question. But also in this passage, there is a statement from Jesus that gets us right to the heart of why the church exists and how each of us is called to participate in that. So, I hope that you are ready this morning to listen carefully to what God wants you to hear during our time in His Word.

Luke 24:36-49

³⁶ While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

³⁷ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

⁴⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹ And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate it in their presence.

⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

It was the first Resurrection Sunday, and the morning had been filled with excitement. The women had gone early that morning to the tomb and found it empty. While they were there angels appeared to them proclaiming that Jesus was alive. Cleopas and his partner took the long walk to Emmaus and were joined by a fascinating stranger. But it wasn't until they sat down at table together that they realized it was the risen Jesus—who then suddenly disappeared. They instantly returned to tell the others what happened. When they got back to Jerusalem, to that upper room, they learned that Jesus had also appeared to Peter. And the disciples were marveling together about all that news.

As they were sharing together in excitement, Jesus himself stood among them (verse 36 on the screen). "Peace be with you," he says. Once again, in the mystery of his resurrection body, Jesus shows up. Of course, since they were all just talking about how he had appeared to Simon and how he had appeared on the road to Emmaus, when Jesus appeared amongst them they instantly believed and celebrated his victory over death ... right? No, look again at verse 37. "They were startled (Okay, I'll give them that, it would be startling to have someone just appear) and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost." It turns out that the disciples were pretty afraid of ghosts. Remember, when they saw Jesus walking on the water, they thought he was a ghost, and they were terrified. Now, Jesus whose dead body had been placed in a tomb a few days earlier was standing there with them, greeting them with peace, and once again they were afraid. But think about it, even with the appearances, what else would they have thought? Jesus was

dead and buried, and now he just appeared, out of nowhere. If he wasn't a ghost, what was he?

In the midst of that fear Jesus asks some questions that are so important for every single one of us to grapple with today. Verse 38: "He said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?'" Jesus asks them, "What are you afraid of? Why are you doubting?" They are reasonable questions. They were just talking together about how Jesus was alive. And, this was something that Jesus had told them would happen. Listen to his words from Luke 9:22 when Jesus was ministering up north in the Galilee, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." It was something he had told them more than once. Now, it was the third day, and Jesus stood among them, alive indeed, just like he said would happen, but still they were afraid. Still, they doubted.

But we can't be too hard on them, can we? Those followers of Jesus, gathered in the upper room, had seen their dream of Israel's redemption die on a cross of shame. They were in hiding - fearing for their own lives. Most of them had fled during Jesus' greatest time of need; so their own guilt and shame must have been chilling. Their circumstances had them doubting, it had them troubled. Was Jesus really alive? Would he accept us? Are we worthy to be part of His Kingdom? What would the authorities do now? Has God abandoned us? Is this just a dream? I don't think we're much different. Many of us are troubled by the circumstances in our lives. I bet some of those same kinds of questions have come up in your minds. It might sound something like, "If Jesus is really alive and loves me, then why hasn't He ..." you fill in the blank. Why hasn't he saved my marriage, or kept my children from harm, or done something significant with me, or stopped injustice in the world? The fact is that fear and doubt are a regular part of our lives too.

I love Jesus' response in verse 39: "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." In the midst of their fear and doubt, Jesus doesn't rebuke them. Rather, he says, "Look at me. I am here. Touch me and see." Jesus invites them to take a closer look at his hands and feet. He invites them to look to him, to hear his voice, to touch him and realize that he is real flesh and bone; he is no ghost. Jesus appears in the flesh, with scars still on his body, saying, "What are you afraid of? Why are you doubting? Look at me. I am really here."

We assume that the disciples did what Jesus told them to do—that they did look at him, that they heard him, that they touched him. Jesus offers this same invitation to us—in the midst of our fears and doubts. Will you heed his invitation? As I spent time in this passage this week, considering my own fears and doubts, I heard Jesus saying to me, "Jeremy, look at me; look at my scars, listen to my breath, feel my presence; I am really here." I can't say that it took away all my

fears, or took away all my doubts, but those words ministered to me. They helped me to have courage enough to confess those fears and doubts to God. They drew me to Him. And they inspired me to believe that even in the midst of those things, I would rather risk it all for Jesus than stay cloistered in my doubts and in my fears.

It's in that confidence that Jesus really is risen and that he really is with us through the Spirit that we can have the courage to ask those we love these same questions. What better way to help each other live into the forgiveness and call of Jesus than to ask each other, "What are you afraid of? What's holding you back?" It's also a good question to ask those we love who don't yet have faith in Jesus – to those who are exploring Christianity.

When I was in high school my mom was leading a Bible study for high school girls. Several of my good friends were in the study; one of them was not a Christian. After several weeks of study together, my mom finally asked her, "What are you afraid of? What's keeping you from faith in Jesus?" It was an important question because it helped my friend think through what was really holding her back. Eventually she said, "I believe this stuff about Jesus, but I don't want to give up my lifestyle." Of course that's not the answer we would have loved to hear, right? But it was the truth, and helping her articulate that was important. Plus, it helped her friends and my mom know how to keep walking with her on her journey of exploration.

If you've been talking with someone about Jesus for a while, at some point you need to ask them, "What are you afraid of? What's holding you back? It's not about closing the deal; it's about helping them do the work they need to do on their journey to faith. You can't predict what their answer is going to be. If they still don't feel ready to receive what Jesus has to give then do what Jesus did for those disciples that day - direct their attention to Him. Help them to look at Him – to know that He is here. But sometimes, their answer will be different.

On last year's men's Mexico trip I had the privilege of sharing a tent with a gentleman who had not yet given his life to Christ. He had been around Chapel Hill for a while and been intentionally exploring what following Christ was all about. Many others had been walking with him, asking him questions along the way and helping him to process his beliefs. That week in Mexico, we were talking about the way that Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus. It was the perfect set up for me to ask him, at the Lord's prompting, while we were getting ready for bed, "What are you afraid of? What's keeping you in the boat? What's keeping you from faith?" His answer was simple. He said, "Nothing, I think I'm ready." So, I said, "Well, have a good night's rest."... No! I said, "Well would you like to pray to commit your life to Jesus right now?" He said, "Yes." so we prayed. Not long after the trip, he was baptized and became a member of our congregation. All I did was ask him the right question at the right time—how cool is that!?

Look back at verse 41. Jesus had one more question to help the disciples get over the hump on believing what they were seeing. Personally, this is one of my favorite questions in all of scripture. He asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" Now that's a question I can get behind. They gave him some fish, Jesus ate it (he wasn't a ghost), and he opened their eyes to what he had been saying to them all along—that all of Scripture was pointing to Him.

Then he gave them this all important charge. Verse 46, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. YOU are witnesses of these things. I'm going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

He tells them. You are the witnesses of these things—you who are still doubting, you who are still afraid, you regular men and women. But don't worry because you are going to receive power from God to live out this mission of God.

I wonder if they were more afraid after hearing what Jesus said, then they were when he appeared among them. Was obeying Jesus' call on your list of top 10 fears? It may not have made the list, but I bet it's there for many of us. What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of what He is going to ask you to do? Are you afraid of what he is going to ask you to give up? Are you afraid that He's going to make you do something risky? Chances are that He is going to ask you to do something risky. If it doesn't make you a little afraid, then maybe you aren't really listening. But wouldn't you rather step out in faith, knowing that Jesus is with you, than just living according to your own plan? What's holding you back from really trusting Jesus with your whole life? What's holding you back from stepping out in faith in your work place? What's holding you back from joining a LifeGroup? What's holding you back from breaking out of your spiritual rut by coming to Celebrate Recovery? What are you afraid of? What's holding you back from joining more fully into the mission of your church?

Those first disciples didn't die in the city waiting for what Jesus promised. The Holy Spirit has come in power. We are the evidence of that—we know about Jesus because the people in that room didn't let their fears & doubts hold them back from obeying Jesus. And if you are in Christ, the same Holy Spirit who equipped those first disciples is working in you! Is there something that God is asking you to do that you have been too afraid to do? Are you doubting His call on your life? Listen to Jesus' words again, "Look at my hands and feet. It is I myself."

Maybe today is the day that you will confess that fear to God. Maybe today is the day that you realize, maybe for the first time, that Jesus really is Lord, that He really is alive. Maybe today is the day that you finally deal with that thing, that wound, that question, that doubt, that insecurity that is holding you back. Maybe

today is the day that you have the courage to ask someone that you love, "What are you afraid of? What's holding you back?" Maybe today is the day that you will stop waiting in the safety of the upper room as if the Holy Spirit hasn't yet come. Maybe today is the day that we will make ourselves available to the Holy Spirit's power and join in fully to the mission of God. What is today going to be for you?

If you are in Christ, you are Holy Spirit filled witnesses of all that Jesus has done. Let's live it out.

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. After reading through the passage again (Luke 24:36-49), what are the things that really seem important to you about it?
 2. Jesus asked the disciples, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?" What makes it hard for you to believe?
 3. What do you think is important about Jesus' final words in Luke's gospel?
 4. What applications does this passage have for you? What applications does it have for our church?