

### Where Is Jesus When We Need Him?

Only gradually did the disciples come to the conviction that Jesus was raised from the dead. The empty tomb told the astonished disciples almost nothing. Saint Paul makes much of resurrection appearances but never mentions an empty tomb. Though Luke narrates a story about the empty tomb, he mostly delights in telling how the followers of Jesus enjoyed a full forty days of meals and conversations with the risen Christ before He finally ascended to God the Father.

It was not the empty tomb that led to their belief that the crucified Jesus had been raised from the dead. Rather it was Jesus' return to them, His presence with them, His undeniable intimacy with them in bread and wine, in sermons and acts of love and mercy; that 's what led them to proclaim to a disbelieving world that the crucified Jesus has been raised from the dead.

He came back not as some apparition or figment of their imaginations. The Christian faith, taking its cues from Jesus, is not a disembodied, spirituality, or simply a sentimental and emotional memory. The Christian faith insistently recognizes and proclaims that: *The Word became flesh*, John 1:14. God's Word has become a person, a person in motion. Jesus is God Almighty daring to get physical; God with a body, muscular, a body in action. After His body was brutally crucified, Jesus moved into His new body.

Many did not want to believe (and many still don't) that Jesus was physically raised from the dead. Well, that's no surprise. They couldn't accept God in the flesh in the first place. But there it is: *The Word became flesh*. This is crucial: Jesus has a body. I didn't say that Jesus had a body. Everybody knows that Jesus slept, ate, wept, and bled and then agonizingly died. What everybody doesn't yet know is that, though the tomb was empty of Jesus' body, Jesus was back—in a resurrected body. He came and went in an instant, unconfined by time and space (see John 20:15-17, 19-20; Luke 24:13-31, 36-39; Mark 16:14; Matt.28:8-9, 16-20). Nevertheless it was a body in which Jesus was recognizable to those who had known Him before. I doubt that Jesus would have been crucified—I'm sure there would be no church— if all we had were the words of Jesus. From the first, the thing that really attracted some people and disturbed others were not the words of Jesus, it was Jesus Himself. His resurrected presence (“I'm back and I'll never let you go”) birthed the church. A church's fond memories of Jesus or sentimental notions about Him does nothing. It was and is Jesus who is God with us, that gives life to churches.

His after-Easter body enabled Him to share meals and arguments with His astonished followers. It was to them irrefutable proof that Christ was raised from the dead. When Christians affirm the Apostles Creed, “We believe in the

resurrection of the body,” we’re saying that we believe that the same God who raised Jesus from the dead shall somehow, someday raise us, but not as ghosts or disembodied spooks. Paul said that our perishable body will put on an “imperishable” body (see 1 Cor. 15:42). The dead shall be raised just as Jesus was raised (see 2 Tim. 2:16-19). *We will all be changed*, (see 1 Cor. 15:35-57). We’ll have spiritual bodies. There’s no person without a body and, in saying that we believe that God will raise our dead bodies to new bodies, we are saying that we believe in the resurrection of persons with recognizable personalities. Specifics of that grand resurrection, such as date and form, are still matters unknown. Nevertheless, when Jesus says, *In my Father’s house there are many rooms ... I am going there to prepare a place for you*, John 14:2, I believe He is telling the truth.

The fact is, we all live somewhere between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. We are on the long Emmaus Road journey together. There are times when we feel alone and overwhelmed and doubts creep in and our heart gives way and we feel like we can’t go on. Then Jesus comes to us and says, “You are not alone. You were never alone. Even when you thought you were alone, I was with you every step of the way.”

We still make that long walk from the grave. We still weep and remember and wonder why. But everything is changed now. It may still be Saturday for many of us, but thank God, Easter has already dawned across the universe. A bright light shines from the garden tomb. The light slowly chases the darkness away until one day, the darkness will be gone forever. Child of God, with the risen Christ, even on dark days, you can never be alone again!

One more thing: those early followers did not say, “Jesus is raised, now we’ll all get to go to heaven when we die and live forever, so let’s just wait around for it.” No, they said, “Jesus is raised! He’s alive! What Jesus said about God is true. We thought He was defeated on the cross, but it wasn’t so. God’s great new world is breaking in right now, before our very eyes! Now we’ve got to show and tell the whole world the truth about reality.”

It must be the same for us: *The Word became flesh*, full of grace and truth and we’re on a mission to share God’s grace and truth with everyone, in our living, in our bodies, in our actions. We are Easter people marching from Good Friday through Holy Saturday into Easter Sunday. We may not quite be fully Easter people in all aspects of our lives, but God help us, we’re moving in the right direction – into the dawning of a new day!

Share the Easter message: Jesus is alive. He is with us today – we’re never alone. We have a mission in this life, and we have a life beyond.