



Supper at Emmaus by Caravaggio

I actually see a great deal of humor in this passage at the end of Luke. First of all there is this stunning appearance of Jesus in the midst of the Disciples, probably once again in the upper room, perhaps, according to tradition in the house of John Mark. (see Acts 12:12)

It must have been like the best candid camera moment ever filmed. Or maybe, Jesus' appearance to His disciples in the upper room was kind of like Tom Sawyer and Huck Fin when they came to their own funeral which was being celebrated because everybody in the mythical town of St. Petersburg, Missouri believed Tom and Huck had perished in the cave looking for Injun

Joe. This appearance by Christ to His disciples in Luke 24 has that kind of humorous, whimsical quality. As Twain wrote, Jesus could have **said** "Well, the reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated."¹

Jesus' appearance in the upper room must have been kind of like a reverse surprise party. Because at a normal surprise party, the table is set with all the food, the room is decorated, and then when the guest of honor is nearing home, all his friends run and hide somewhere in the room. And then when the guest of honor appears in the room, the lights come on and everybody jumps out from behind various pieces of furniture shouting "Surprise!" And the guest of honor is joyously stunned.

Except, in this case, Jesus turns the surprise party on its head; although He is really the guest of honor, He appears out of nowhere, and it's **everybody else** who is stunned completely speechless in amazement. "Surprise!"

And we know this isn't the first time He's appeared to people after the Resurrection. He's already appeared to the two Marys at the empty tomb. (See Mt. 28:10) Earlier on in this same Chapter of Luke, Jesus has just appeared to the Disciples at Emmaus. In John, Chapter 20 He appeared in this upper room at least twice, once when Thomas was absent, and then again when Thomas was there. There are at least 23 references in the Bible to the Lord appearing to His disciples between His Resurrection and His Ascension.²

I get the impression that by this appearance in the upper room in Luke, Jesus was getting a little irritated with the Disciples at this point. He's appeared to them several times, and nobody has yet offered him a single thing to eat. So now, he finally asks, "What's for supper? Here, I'll show you I'm real alright; I'll show you I'm human; What's for supper? I mean, at Emmaus I had to leave before even the warm bread got served. I'm hungry! What's for supper?" Is it any wonder that in John's Gospel, at Jesus' last earthly encounter with the disciples before His ascension at the lakeside, He takes matters into his own hands, and **He** fixes breakfast? I mean, if he leaves it up to this band of dimwits, there likely to sit there gawking at him for the rest of eternity, and he'll never get anything to eat!

I think Jesus actually laughed a lot. I truly believe He had to have laughed when we was walking among us. I mean, at Cana, when He turned the water into wine, I'm absolutely sure that there must have been people at that wedding who, when they tasted the wine Jesus had made, wanted to show off just a little bit. There must have been folks who said something like, "Hmm...I'm tasting here a full bodied varietal with light tannins, and a hint of blueberries and grapefruit, probably oak aged. This is without a doubt a Pinot noir/merlot blend from Chateau Bethany, vintage 31 AD." I mean, don't you just bet there were people like that at the wedding in Cana? And don't you know that Jesus was just laughin' and laughin'?

¹ What Twain wrote in 1897 concerning the rumors of his ill (and recovered) cousin James Ross Clemens (see <http://www.twainquotes.com/Death.html>)

² Zondervan *NIV Study Bible*, notes, p. 1620

When we get to verse 41 in this chapter from Luke, the one that reads, "...and they still did not believe Him because of joy and amazement" I think what Luke was trying to say here is that the disciples at this point got a fit of the giggles. And you've seen it happen; you know how contagious this is, a fit of the giggles. And what a logical, reasonable reaction this would have been for the Disciples to have, because of this amazing, wondrous, stunning turn of events – "What... you mean... the Lord is alive?!!! Wow!!!!"

A clergyman with decades of experience in parish ministry said to me this week, "You know, James, true joy is really the indisputable evidence of presence of the Holy Spirit." If so, then those congregations who truly worship the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ should be, above all else, joyous places. This is the main reason why tithing is so important. You see, the best way to destroy joy, the most efficient weapon the Evil One has to rob God's children of their joy is worry. And if your household is anything like mine, every now and again when we get to about the 24th or 25th of the month, things in the household cookie jar start looking a little bare. At times like that it's easy to succumb to worry. In days like that, it's easy to turn material wealth into an idol, believing that somehow it's more important to hoard that wealth, it's more critical to hold fast to our money, instead of doing as the Psalmist says this morning which is to "Offer the appointed sacrifices, and [to] put your trust in the LORD" (See Ps.4:5). Instead, sometimes we worry to such an extent that we put our trust in our material well-being and our own plans. That's a sure way to destroy the joy of The Lord. And some congregations turn a blind eye to this kind of idolatry, some churches refuse to recognize the importance of regular tithing as a means of assuring their trust in The Lord rather than in the things of this world – some congregations pursue that path for years, and decades, and even generations until that church ceases to be a place for the regular, joyous worship of The Lord. And if left in that unrepentant, idolatrous, joyless state that kind of church eventually shuts its doors and simply ceases to be a church – if it ever truly was a church at all. As I've said so many times, God doesn't need us to tithe. We do.

A lot of scholars have come to the conclusion that, if the day of Pentecost in Acts Chapter 3 was the Birthday of the Church, then this evening in the upper room when Jesus appeared to His disciples – this passage really represents the beginning of the Christian worship experience. For the first time, Jesus' followers were gathered together after His Crucifixion, and they were praying together without the Lord physically being there, perhaps really for the first time as a group. And low and behold the Lord arrives in his wondrous Resurrected form and stands in their midst. And their reaction is joy, a joy so powerful and contagious that it cannot be contained.

Well, if that's true, and if this is the beginning of Christian worship, if this is really the model that we have been given for worshiping The Lord, then above all else, shouldn't our own worship be filled to overflowing with joy? This Easter, are you giving yourself over to this amazing, contagious joy? Yes, it's true, with the Resurrection, Jesus has presented us with life, new life, eternal life. And the hallmark of that miraculous abundant life is joy. Remarkable, overwhelming, contagious joy. As people of the Resurrected Christ, let us be people of His joy.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

jwb† 04-16-18