

Can You Prove You Are Alive?

“Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” Luke 24:39

"Resurrection Mary" is undoubtedly Chicago's most famous ghost. This blonde-hair, blue-eyed beauty has been seen since the latter 1930s.

According to legend, she went to a dance at the O'Henry Ballroom which is now called the Willowbrook, 8900 Archer Avenue and apparently got into an argument with her boyfriend. She then began to hitchhike down Archer Ave. and somewhere between the Willowbrook and the main gates of Resurrection Cemetery, 7600 Archer Ave. she was struck and killed by a hit and run driver. Soon after this, people began to see a girl in a long white dress and blond hair hitchhiking for rides along Archer Avenue.

The very first, first-person account came from Jerry Palus, a south-side man who picked up a girl at the Liberty Grove and Hall near 47th and Mozart and danced with her the entire evening. The only strange thing is that she was very cold to the touch. Later she asked for a ride home which was somewhere in the Bridgeport area of Chicago but decided she'd like to go for a ride past the large Catholic cemetery along Archer Avenue, Resurrection. As they began to approach the main gates, she began to act very strangely. She told Jerry to pull the car off the road and, for some reason, she had to run toward the cemetery and that Jerry could not follow. Before he knew what was happening, she darted from the car, ran towards the main gates but disappeared before reaching those gates in plain view of Jerry.

He later visited the home of Mary, was greeted by a woman who told him that her daughter had been dead for sometime. He saw a picture of her sitting on a table and was convinced that she was the same girl he had been with as impossible as that was!

On that first day of resurrection, the disciples thought they had seen a ghost. What should have brought joy at Jesus greeting, produced terror and a chill down their spine. Their Jesus had been crucified. What were they seeing? The violins of the eerie and macabre were taunting their sensibilities!

Whatever scripture lessons Jesus had taught them went bye-bye! They could not connect the supernatural with Moses, the prophets and the psalms. Like most skeptics brought up to believe only what science could prove they wanted some evidence but no one dared

move. Even if they wanted to fear gripped their muscles. What was going on?

Perhaps you remember when a frightening dream awoke you or last night's horror movie got to your psyche and you froze in bed and could not even speak. That's the picture here. You just know it can't be real but it was so vivid like you were there!

Jesus was no ghost. He had flesh and bones but he needed to demonstrate he was alive and real as his disciples. So he performed the most radical test of his post resurrection appearance. Did he prove $E=mc^2$? Did he disappear and reappear bringing with him his buddies Moses and Elijah? No! Those things would have been impressive. What he did was simply sit down and have lunch!

A decade ago there was a news report about an Army veteran named John Crabtree who had been receiving benefits from the government. Evidently he had been wounded in Vietnam and was now on permanent disability. One day, out of the blue, he received an official notification from the government of his own death. Needless to say, this was quite a shock!

Mr. Crabtree wrote the government a letter stating that he was indeed very much alive and would like to continue receiving his benefits. The letter did no good.

He then tried calling the government. (Have you ever tried to call the government? This required the patience of Job and the persistence of Noah!) The phone calls didn't change the situation either. Finally, as a last resort, the veteran contacted a local television station, which ran a human-interest story about his situation.

During the interview, the reporter asked him, "How do you feel about this whole ordeal?" The veteran chuckled and said, "Well, I feel a little frustrated by it. After all, have you ever tried to prove that you're alive?"

That's a pretty good question for all of us. Could you prove that you are alive? Really, genuinely, deep-down alive? When was the last time you had an alive moment? Not the last time you took a breath or had your heart beat inside your chest, but the last time you felt yourself alive to your living, alive to your loving, deeply present with the gift of life itself?" (From: R. Scott Colglazier, *Finding a Faith That Makes Sense*, St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1996, 116-117).

Today in the New Beginnings study we join together to talk about My Spirituality – yours and mine. Who are we as Christians? Do we

know why we believe as we do? If you were asked to could you prove your faith is alive? What evidence of being spiritually alive would you give?

These are vital questions for us during this Easter season. Last week's session on MY CHURCH, we were asked the question, "Are we relevant in Janesville?" We heard Marcia and Joe Schwengles tell us that they randomly asked people at the Janesville McDonalds if they had heard of Trinity Church? On first try there were none. Then one person remembered the church with the "red doors."

There are visitors among us who are searching for a faith and a spirituality that is vibrant and alive. Two couples came last week. One couple I will be visiting this week. If you were coming with me what would you tell them?

We cannot relive the past. The past cannot be repeated. Yet, I say to you remember the past and the good this church has done. And now let us go together into a New Beginning. Let us beg the Holy Spirit to fall fresh on each one of us. Let us beg the Holy Spirit to fall upon those not yet among us who are searching for us, and let us beg the Holy Spirit to teach us to bear witness to those who will come what Jesus has said and done. AMEN