

After Easter, Jesus appeared to the disciples on and off for forty days.

First, Jesus appeared to two men walking on the road from Jerusalem to Emaeus. When they arrived at Emaeus, Jesus broke the bread and disappeared from sight.

Jesus appeared twice to the disciples in the upper room, behind locked doors. He seemed like a ghost, then, but he had a body. They could thrust fists into his side.

Later, in Galilee, the disciples found an ephemeral Jesus cooking fish on the shore, and they watched him eat. Finally, today, they watch a very physical Jesus disappear as a vapor into clouds.

The message is unmistakable: Jesus is physically resurrected - his body is in-tact – and paradoxically, he is a ghost.

How can this be?

Personally, I think Einstein comes into play. As I've suggested before, modern physics might work with modern spirituality. Physicists claim there are multiple dimensions, existing side by side. Given these stories of the resurrection, one might wonder whether the resurrected Jesus lived physically in two dimensions simultaneously: our physical world, and God's other world.

You remember Star Trek? How Captain Kirk and Spock would de-materialize in one place, only to re-materialize in another? Beam me up, Scotty, and atoms and molecules would dissipate into thin air, cells folding into some wrinkle in the universe, only to emerge through a back door to some other place.

You are as close to the farthest spot in the universe as you are to your own backyard.

In Jesus' case, he merely passed through dimensions to slip from one side of the locked door to the other.

At the Ascension, he dissipated as vapor into clouds, only to find a place in God's eternal dimension. Physics and spirituality.

Fanciful?

Not if, as I said, Einstein is to be believed.

Maybe it didn't happen that way. Maybe the Ascension is a mere myth. (Myth, by the way, does not necessarily mean false story. It can mean story with overarching message, regardless of factuality.)

Maybe the story is myth; it doesn't matter, because it conveys two important messages.

First, the resurrected Jesus now resides with God as Father, and together, with the Holy Spirit, they are transmitting love unremittably into this world. God loves you, and won't leave you alone.

Second, and this is a concept Jesus tried very hard to teach the disciples: there really are two worlds existing side-by-side, and Jesus is calling Christians to live in both, simultaneously.

You have no choice about the first. You have to live in this very physical world of material existence. You do have a choice about the second. The second is the spiritual world. The kingdom of God, Jesus was fond of calling it.

Jesus claimed that Christians – and hinted that anyone, really – can live with one foot in each dimension. Dual citizenship.

Neither world is more real or more important than the other. Rather, the two worlds dovetail, tongue and groove, were made for each other.

Sadly, many Christians think you should live in one more than in the other. You've heard it said, some Christians are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good.

That is too bad, for God concluded about this physical world, with its joys and thrills, and pain and sadness, it is good.

Other Christians think faith is just about politics, or social justice. That, too, is a shame, for healing and restoration of this physical world come through the spirit.

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner - who likes to teach Christians about Jewish spirituality – says the difference between Christian and Jewish spirituality is this: Christian spirituality distinguishes between the material world on the one hand and the spiritual on the other. This dualism is derived from Greek thought influencing early Christian philosophy.

Jewish spirituality, however, makes no such distinction. In Jewish spirituality, the two exist together. Material and spiritual.

Which is a little of what Jesus is trying to say this morning. Two worlds – you live in both.

That, perhaps, is why you are constituted of both body and spirit. Body and spirit – integrated into one person. You are neither a spirit that has a body, nor a mass of cells serving as a repository for spirit.

You are both, integrated, you are complete by both.

And that is how you can live simultaneously in two worlds.

This isn't esoteric nonsense. Understanding this concept makes a difference, which gets to the point of my message.

You probably are curious about what makes me tick, especially now that I've accepted the call to serve as your next rector. My theology, or philosophy. Why I do what I do -

It really is not complicated. Right now, I'm telling you the very basis of my religious belief.

I am first about the spiritual: you can touch God, you can know God, you will have a deeper and richer life by knowing God – for God is eternity itself, and you touch eternity when you touch God. When you discover, actually discover, that God loves you, God accepts you, as you are, without qualification.

Hence, the spiritual side becomes psychological, as so many of our psychological challenges stem from a deep sense of rejection.

I am second about the physical. This world matters.

And this second part has its own subparts. First, the world really is good. God affirms life, wants you to live it fully. Or, as Jesus said, I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.

The world has, however, become tainted by darkness, which leads to the second subpart: Redemption of this world.

Because God has been so generous, giving you abundant life, you get to share it with others, in the form of material goods and grace. Those around you, your family, your community, your church. But also those in need – and especially those in need – the sick, the destitute, the infirm.

You do engage in politics and social justice, as a part of the redemptive process.

The overarching objective with both the spiritual and the physical is not happiness, but meaning. This life is about meaning. And you find meaning, depth, fulfillment in these two: in God – love in the spiritual - and in giving away.

Which is another way of saying,

Love the Lord your God with
all your heart and soul and mind,

and love your neighbor as yourself.

There you have it. I am really very simple. That is the very simple foundation of most of what I will say to you from this spot, hopefully with some interesting variation.

Thank you for calling me. I'm looking forward to a good future together.