My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Lord of our Eastertide Bodies, Hearts, Souls, and Spirits, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in Your sight, our strength and our Redeemer, Amen.

What do we know about ghosts? I’ll bet our knowledge of ghosts comes from what we’ve seen in movies but like Caspar the Friendly Ghost. Lots of us will lump in apparitions, poltergeists, and all other manner of other-worldly thing when we think of the word ghost. They are here, but not. In a spirit world from which they don’t quite belong, but cannot come back among the living, like you and I. For me I learned at a young age how the quintessential ghost looks and acts and behaves, because we had this set of encyclopedias called the Book of Knowledge. And these volumes were from 1945, when the world was on fire and so many things we take for granted today had not yet been discovered. So one thing the Book of Knowledge did to fill the gaps was to publish great poems and stories everyone should know. It was the Book of Knowledge after all, right? And the ghost I encountered was in Charles Dickens’ classic story “A Christmas Carol. Jacob Marley, Scrooge’s partner, is a ghost. Ghosts haunt the living to avenge those who’ve been wronged, and to teach them the lessons that leave them suspended in the Spirit world. Marley, rattling in chains, was one scary ghost.

And it’s not just a modern conception, is it? Even our Gospel says of the apostles, “they were startled and thought that they were seeing a ghost” when Jesus appeared. Maybe Jesus came to settle the score, since they were not exactly standing up for Jesus at his trial, punishment, crucifixion, and aftermath. Only a few days earlier they’d abandoned Jesus in his time of need. If you were a disciple, and all that was on your heart and soul, it’s the first Easter, and in the city where Jesus was killed, withing walking distance of his tomb, there is Jesus’ presence. And they’re scared.

And some time later, we see the crowds gathering to something almost as impossible as this Spirit sighting. Peter and John has healed a person in Jesus’ name. And we can once again go into some dialogue about what the crowd did, and what Peter said. You could probably preach this one in your sleep, as could I. So let’s skip all that for now, because we allllll know that sermons are based on scripture, that is addressed to us, and that the topic is about our relationship to God. So instead of going into too much detail on crowds today, let’s think what Peter might have said in his sermon to us if he were standing here beside me as our guest pastor.

He might have said, “the healing you just saw was not magic, no slight of hand or skill required. You witnessed God’s healing power, right here, right now. Nothing that any of you can do can come close to God’s power when unleashed for good. So don’t dismiss it, deny it, or say it didn’t happen, don’t misname it or try and control it or make it smaller than the miracle it is. Be changed and allow yourself to see God’s power for what it is. Miraculous.”

So maybe Peter continues. Maybe he asks, “How many miracles did you see on your way to church today? How many did you see yesterday? You’re faithful people of God, followers of our Master, Teacher and Lord, so how many miracles do you expect to see tomorrow? How many did you tell your friends and loved ones about?”

If Peter were here right now asking these things, I’d have to answer that I’m not all that aware of any miracles happening. Our minds are trained to explain everything away when confronted with something not just inexplicable, but beautiful, serene, poetic, saying they’re colors refracted in the atmosphere at a certain time of day, or the absence of wind on the water and the leaves, and a person who has knowledge of just the right combination of words or phrases. Things that move us can be understood that way.

And Peter would say, my brothers and sisters, on the other side of Easter, that’s exactly the point. We don’t see the wonder and the miracles happening each moment much less each day or week or month of our lives, from the moment we breathe first to our last. And Peter would tell us that our lives, lived without the wonder and the space for un-knowing and uncertainty, are disconnected from God.

And this, only two weeks from the resurrection Peter didn’t quite understand either, but he accepted, heart, mind, soul, and Spirit. We have just re-affirmed the resurrection in our lives, that it would be central to our being every day now. And if we did that—if we saw each day as this beauty and wonder and what the Bible calls “Fear of God” but which really means “Awe of God”—then we can stop wasting time trying to control everything over which we have no control. Gas prices. Stock markets. Snowfall next winter. The number of red oak acorns which fall in the forest and which determine the number of squirrels the following year. All manner of things we worry about over which we have little control, but that take up our minds, hearts, and spirits and sap our strength for beauty, and wonder, and marvel at what is right here before us, this day, in this place.

Instead of kind of pursing our lips (I can see us doing that right now, even if it’s in our mind) and taking colors and sounds and smells and laughter and expectant babies and tears and our digestion of another plate of store-bought pasta because we don’t have the time to make our own or think we can…do we notice that gravity is working, grass is green again, and there is sun and birds and people around us who are neighbors we are called to love? What will ultimately crack open our hearts to where we say “Wow.” And let go of the worries, and in the next breath say, “Thanks”. Instead of sniping and complaining, we can sing.

Now, if we want to see life as a grind, no one will stop us. But I like to think God has planned to take stress out of our lives, not put more into it. Peter, if he were here, would say, “there is more to life than that”. We just need to turn around and see joy rather than rigid systems and controls which narrow our focus of abundant grace and life.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

The disciples were full of angst and not connected to God in the way Peter now talks about it. At first, in their guilt and shame, they saw Jesus as a manifestation of death. And they had to learn that Jesus came as a manifestation of LIFE. Jesus says, “Peace be with you”, trying to calm them and that there’s no grudges here. But they need more. And we would too.

So Jesus shows them his wounds. He has them watch him eat. “Ghosts don’t eat” he says in verse 39. He’s trying to convince them that repentance and forgiveness for EVERYONE, starting in the town and with the people who had him killed, where the disciples deserted him, is for ALL people, ALL the nations, for ALL TIME. He doesn’t let the forces of death, unknowing, anxiety, and fear govern his life. Instead, Jesus surprises the guilty with an offer to love, peace, and calm.

Both Peter and Jesus are speaking to all of us who reject life, whether occasionally or more so. It’s easy to say, “LIVE!” And so hard to let go of the familiar where we just don’t trust it, however attractive. But we are given that choice, this day and every day.

Won’t you join Jesus and Peter? We have that choice. Thanks be to God, Amen.