

# Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, April 14, 2024  
"Through Fear and Doubt"

## *Young at Heart Message*

Would you believe me if I said I used to live with a cow whisperer?

The cow whisperer had some kind of power over cows, and they would come to the cow whisperer no matter where they were in the pasture.

They would follow the cow whisperer as she walked, and they would crowd around her to be as close to her as possible every time they saw her.

Do you believe me?

If I could prove it, would it be easier to believe?

It can be hard to take my word for it when I say something like this because, while we might be able to envision it in theory, it's harder to believe the cow whisperer had such a magic touch over a herd of cows.

Maybe it happened once, and maybe that was a fluke. But to say it happened every time the cows were in the presence of the cow whisperer is more difficult to believe.

So, I can understand why you might want proof.

Why don't we start with a couple pictures.

Here she is with one cow...



Do you believe me now?

I will admit that seeing a picture of her with one cow might not be enough to convince you that she's a cow whisperer.

I could have easily manufactured that photo anyway – AI can do some pretty cool things these days.

So let's try another one...



How about now?

It's probably getting a little bit easier to believe that she's a cow whisperer.

But it's also possible that those cows just happened to be standing by the fence when we walked by.

And, nowadays, it's still possible that I created that image using AI!

So, I could understand why you might still be skeptical.

Well, there's one more thing I could do to prove to you that Lyra was a cow whisperer.

I could show you a video...

<https://youtu.be/ZUZEQLSyXo8?si=MC8Q8TuPsWaQclXx>

And, just to make sure you believe me, because even in that last video, those cows could have just been hanging out there when we came along, I'll show you one more short video:

<https://youtu.be/pplwGkpCPRY?si=RXVOawSX-eMNU8sC>

Now, I think this last video offers the best proof that Lyra was a cow whisperer.

And, at some point, you kind of just have to believe me when I say this happened any time we saw cows.

She was also the only dog I had who prompted the cows to come say hi every time she walked by.

The cows didn't care about me, or any of my other dogs.

So, I hope this is enough proof, and you'll believe me now when I say that I used to live with a genuine cow whisperer.

It's a gift, I know.

### ***The Message***

So, why am I sharing this silly story about Lyra and her cows?

In today's scripture, we heard the story of one of Jesus' appearances to the disciples after his resurrection.

And in that story, the disciples are initially afraid.

This seems to be a common theme in the stories in which Jesus returns to the disciples after his death.

But it also makes sense that the disciples would be afraid and full of doubt.

This is not something the disciples are accustomed to experiencing.

It's not like people just rise from the dead every day.

I imagine that if we experienced something like this, we would be full of doubt and fear, too.

And, I think we would also want some significant proof, just like it's easier to believe my cow whisperer story when you can see it.

So Jesus offers the disciples proof.

First, he tells them to look at his hands and his feet.

Then, as though he knows this won't be enough proof for them, he tells the disciples to touch him and find out for themselves.

In other words, they don't have to just take his word for it, just like you didn't have to take my word for it when I said I lived with a cow whisperer.

Once the disciples, presumably, are satisfied that Jesus is real, and their doubt is eased a bit, Jesus reminds them that he told them everything that would happen, and it was as it was prophesied.

Once again, he's offering them proof that he is who he says he is.

And I am actually grateful for this passage.

I think it could be read as though the disciples still have a weak faith.

But I don't think that's what is actually happening here.

I think Jesus is well aware that even though he told them he would be resurrected, it is very hard to believe something like that when it is not something you have ever experienced before.

In fact, it's something that most people would have deemed impossible before it happened.

So I have to imagine that when Jesus first told the disciples, they *wanted* to believe it would happen.

They had a sense of what Jesus meant, but it had to be a completely foreign notion in actuality.

So their doubt is completely normal, and Jesus recognizes it and helps them to come to the conclusion that it is really him, and not a ghost or a figment of their imaginations.

I appreciate this passage because it reminds us that doubt and fear, especially about faith, are normal, healthy responses.

Doubt and fear are normal, healthy responses not only to faith, but to all kinds of things that happen in our lives.

And there are many things that cannot be proven, at least not with the technology or the knowledge that we currently have.

So when someone, even Jesus, tells us something that our human minds can't seem to comprehend, it is normal to seek proof.

The difficulty with many faith-based ideas is that proof is hard to come by.

We might go our entire lives filled with questions and doubts because there are some elements of faith that we simply cannot prove.

We can study and we can learn, we can listen to sermons and we can read the Bible and we can have deep conversations about faith and spirituality, but we can still feel these feelings of doubt and fear rise in us with regard to the unknown.

And that is normal. It is healthy, and it is safe.

It is human instinct to seek proof, not only for our own realities, but for the questions and doubts we carry as well.

So the beauty of this passage is that Jesus understands human doubt and fear.

He realizes the disciples have never experienced anything like this, and he offers a gentle reminder and proof of his existence in front of them.

He helps them to feel less like they are seeing a ghost, and he helps them to feel more confident in his presence and in his promise to fulfill the prophecy.

And he helps us to feel more confident in his grace and mercy, too.

But I think most importantly, Jesus helps us to feel normal.

He helps us to understand that our human desires, our human fears, and our human doubts are nothing to be ashamed of.

There is understanding in this passage, and there is hope.

We receive the grace that Jesus offers to all of us, and we know by this example that we can bring any doubt and fear we hold to God without feeling ashamed or like we've failed God.

This passage reminds us that it is not possible to fail God.

Jesus could have reprimanded the disciples and made them feel guilty and ashamed for doubting, or made them feel like failures.

But he didn't.

He loved them endlessly, and we are loved in the same meaningful way.

We are loved through our doubts and our fears and our uncertainties, and we receive God's grace every day.

We can come to God with all of this, and lay our burdens down and rest knowing that this love transcends all of our doubts and fears.

May we rest knowing that we are loved this deeply every day of our lives. Amen.

Let us pray:

When we are blinded by anger,  
you pour out your love  
for all to see;  
when we wonder  
what tomorrow will bring,  
you call us to trust in you;  
when sadness fills our hearts,  
you plant gladness in our hearts.  
God of Easter:

touch us with your grace.

You show us your hands,  
so we may reach out  
to mend the broken;  
you show us your feet,  
so we may walk with  
those the world passes by;  
you show us your face,  
so we may know who our  
sisters and brothers look like.

Risen Christ:  
touch us with your compassion.

You open our eyes,  
so we may see God's love;  
you open our minds,  
so we may welcome God's Word;  
you open our lips,  
so we may be God's witnesses.

Spirit of Hope:  
touch us with your peace.

God in Community, Holy in One,  
open us to your presence,  
today and every day. Amen.

~ Written by Thom M. Shuman - Lectionary Liturgies