

**3rd Sunday of Easter  
April 26, 2009 (10 am)**

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**It is easy to think that these Easter stories, these post-resurrection appearances, are primarily history. That they are about the early disciples and their incredulity. But they are also—and perhaps primarily—about us. Today’s opening prayer is an explicit reminder. The church prays today that “we may look forward with hope to *our [own]* resurrection.” There is something here that is about *us*, here and now, and something for us about our own future. But what?**

**We all know the phrase: what you see is what you get. Some of us make a point of living somewhat skeptical lives based almost completely on this maxim. Well, prepare to be dis-illusioned. In today’s gospel story what you see is not exactly what you get. You get less and you get more. And the resurrection gets even more complicated. His—and ours.**

**But let’s start somewhere else. By now I suppose that at least some of you—if not most of you—have seen on TV or on YouTube a remarkable clip from a British television show called “Britain’s Got Talent.” [Web note: [click here](#) to watch the video.]**

**It shows a first-time contestant, Susan Boyle, a rather ordinary looking—**

to put it mildly—47 year old Scottish woman who confesses that she would like to become a professional singer. To call her rather “frumpy” looking would not be exaggerated, I think. And as she approaches center stage in the filled auditorium, no one expects much from her. In fact, later one of the judges says: this whole audience was laughing at you at the beginning.

Susan chose to sing “I dreamed a Dream” from *Les Miserables*. And when she opens her mouth, a most glorious, professional-sounding voice soars. The camera pans to the stunned judges’ faces, and then to the audience jumping to their feet in amazement and admiration.

This television clip has had at least 47 million “hits” on You Tube throughout the world. (That could be a homily in itself: 47 million people. Imagine if Jesus had that kind of an audience within ten days of the Sermon on the Mount.)

If you Google *Les Miserables*, you get Susan Boyle. If you Google: “I Dreamed a Dream” you get Susan Boyle. Even if you just Google “TV contest,” you get Susan Boyle. Even the Religion blogosphere is catching on. In this morning’s Boston Globe Fr. Jim Martin of America Magazine gives his take. Jim thinks people’s fascination has to do with the fact that “the way people see Susan Boyle is very nearly the way God sees us: worthwhile,

**special, talented, unique, beautiful....God sees the real person,” he says.**

**That may be a bit too much eisegesis, but at least the video is one of the best examples I’ve seen lately of a couple of other adages many of us use:**

**“Looks can be deceiving.” And “don’t judge a book by its cover.”**

**Back to our gospel. Our translation today says that when Jesus appears to his apostles and says “Peace be with you,” the apostles are “startled and terrified.” Other translations have it they were “astonished and scared.” A few minutes later, after Jesus exhorts them to touch him and see his wounds, the gospel says they were still “incredulous for joy and amazed.” Other translations have it “they believed not and wondered for joy.” Still another has it “in their joy they were disbelieving.” These are all remarkable emotions—and complex.**

**I imagine the apostles faces just like the judges’ and audience’s faces on that TV show. They, too, were incredulous for joy. What you see is not, in this instance, what you get. The apostles think they are seeing a ghost. And so Jesus asks for food to prove to them that he is real, alive, still flesh and blood. But not just any kind of flesh and blood. He has a body, to be sure. But it is a body that St. Paul will later call “a glorified body.” Don’t ask today for a fuller explanation of that phenomenon, please. I don’t know!**

**Today's gospel passage and last Sunday's have remarkable resonances. They both have Jesus suddenly "appearing" to the disciples; his first words are the same "Peace be with you;" and in both he shows them his hands, and feet, and side. But the theological emphases in each are quite different.**

**Last week's appearance in John's gospel was about belief. It took one person, the so-called "doubting Thomas," to say what everyone else was thinking. What's going on? Can we really believe this? This week, Luke's point is that this person standing before them is real. He is not a "spirit." He is not a ghost. He is not just a blessed memory. He is alive and real and, while once lost to them, is now found again. He is tangible in bodily form and "really real!"**

**Now here comes the puzzling part about us. If Jesus is simply the "first-born" from the dead, and we are all to follow in his footsteps, and as surely as he has been vindicated by God, we shall be too, then what really is death like *for us*? And what will *our* resurrection look like, feel like? That's the focus of the church's prayer this morning.**

**Most days, I have little doubt that this particular body ain't going nowhere when I die. When I've died, this mortal coil will be incinerated or buried and return to the dust from which it was formed. Or will it? I guess it**

**will. But today's gospel raises doubts and questions—at least for me.**

**And, like those first disciples, I wonder. I too wonder in my incredulity. Do our loved ones who have gone before us simply live-on in blessed memory or is St. Luke trying to tell us something else here? I know we are all much more scientifically advanced than St. Luke was. I know we've come to accept certain appearances as fact. I do too—usually. But what is the point of the baked fish, and the healed-but-not-invisible wounds? And why does he keep repeating the mantra: Peace be with you? Am I missing something?**

**With thanks to Cameron Mackintosh (and with lyrics by Herbert Kretzmer) let's return to *Les Miserables*.**

**There was a time when love was blind  
And the world was a song  
And the song was exciting....**

**I dreamed a dream in time gone by  
When hope was high  
And life worth living  
I dreamed that love would never die  
I dreamed that God would be forgiving**

**Do we always “get” only what we see? Are appearances really all that convincing? The next time *you* eat some baked scrod, think about it. And remember Susan Boyle too. Peace be with you!**