I don’t think that there is much disagreement among us that we live in cynical and mistrusting times. Surveys have shown that trust of various institutions is at historic lows. We are mistrustful of other people to the point that our assumption is that you can’t trust anyone you don’t know. And that’s a problem, because how are you going to get to know people if you don’t trust them?

Lack of trust affects many practical things that happen in our lives, including business. Here’s a little story that is an example of that, one that I used several years ago.

A Baptist deacon advertises in the local paper that he has a milk cow for sale for $800. After a couple of days, he gets a prospective buyer out at his farm. “Is this the place with the cow for sale?” the would-be buyer asks. “Yes,” says the deacon, and he takes the man out to see the cow.

“How much milk does this cow give?” the interested buyer asked.

“Six gallons a day, just like clockwork,” was the reply.

“Well, how do I know you’re telling the truth?” asked the buyer.

“Hey,” the deacon said, “you can trust me, I’m a Baptist deacon.”

“OK,” the buyer said, “I’ll buy it. I’ll take it home now and come back with the money tomorrow. You can trust me, I’m a Presbyterian elder.”

So they agree to the terms and the farmer goes back to the house. He thinks quietly for a minute, then asks his wife, “What’s a Presbyterian elder?”

She says, “It’s about the same as a Baptist deacon.”

“Oh no,” the farmer says. “I just lost my cow.”

Part of the reason that we don’t trust is that we don’t know or fully understand the situation and the people involved. Cynicism then becomes a way that we deal with unknown situations, so that we don’t get tricked or disappointed. So how can we in the church combat the kind of cynicism that separates us from the world?”

 **Luke 24:36b-48 NIV**

**Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." 40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.**

In this part of Luke’s gospel, we have accounts of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances. In the scripture just prior to this one, Luke has been describing the appearance of Jesus on the road to Emmaus and at a banquet held afterwards. Soon after the believers there understood that the resurrected Jesus was visiting them, Jesus disappeared. The Emmaus believers traveled back to Jerusalem (about 7 miles away) to tell the 11 remaining apostles about what they had witnessed.

In today’s scripture, as at Emmaus, Jesus appears suddenly, without warning. Here, because they were inside and they hadn’t seen anyone come in through the door, the disciples believe they are seeing a “ghost”. The word in Gk is pneuma, which actually means “spirit”, but our translation goes with “ghost” because that is the way we would say it in English (i.e., “you look like you’ve seen a ghost”). But, as an aside, there is another word for “ghost” in Gk – phantasma. But suffice it to say, whether we use ghost or spirit, the disciples are afraid because they think that’s what Jesus is.

Throughout the Bible, we see that folks in the presence of the holy are often afraid. Here, however, it is not at all clear that the apostles know that they are in the presence of holiness. Jesus, seeing their fear, says, “Peace be with you”, the traditional Hebrew greeting of “shalom.” But that doesn’t help; they’re still frightened because they don’t yet know who this “spirit” really is. The apostles are afraid of the unknown.

There are 2 main human responses to the unknown. One is curiosity, the other is fear. We see examples throughout history. In ancient times, people feared the unknown dangers that they might find in the wilderness – wild animals, bandits, getting caught in a sand storm, etc. In medieval times, the dark depths of the European forests were feared, spawning tales of ogres and trolls and other scary creatures. When Christopher Columbus began his first journey, many people feared that he was going to sail right off the edge of the flat earth. Thus, the unknown has always been with us, and it has been a catalyst for both good and bad responses that we humans have made. Psychologists tell us that much more research remains to be done on understanding our fear of the unknown, but one thing is sure – it is innate in human beings; a part of who we are.

What is the big unknown for many of us today? While there are other good candidates, the primary one is undoubtedly technology. We know that we have faced technological changes in the past, and they were met with some suspicion. When cars first came out, folks thought that these crazy contraptions would never replace horses. When television was invented, folks predicted that it would just be a fad. But today we know what a huge difference these technologies have made in our lives and how they have changed things in ways that could not have been predicted.

Today’s issue with technology is that it is changing at an ever increasing pace. How do we keep up with it? How do we keep our personal information out of the hands of those who would misuse it? Are we going to lose jobs to robots? That used to be a joke, like something you would see on the Jetson’s (sorry to those young enough to not get that reference), but it’s getting increasingly real now. And some scientists have argued that artificial intelligence is a real threat to humanity, while others claim that there is nothing to be afraid of.

So in our passage, Jesus gives the apostles the chance to eliminate the unknown. Jesus offers them the opportunity to touch him, to prove that he is not a ghost but someone with a solid body. Then, he shows them his hands and his feet, which of course are the places where his body was nailed to the cross. That should convince the apostles, shouldn’t it?

**41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence. 44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.**

The apostles are now not scared because by feeling his body and seeing his hands and feet they have seen that Jesus is not a ghost. But strangely enough, they still have trouble believing that this is really Jesus, raised from the dead. The apostles are skeptical. How can this be? It’s too good to be true.

And what does that mean? “Too good to be true” means that that thing cannot really be happening, because those kinds of things just “don’t” happen. And today, we have a variant saying of “too good to be true” that we hear as a warning: “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.” This warning is applied to scams on the phone and over e-mail. We are thus taught to be suspicious (and rightly so) when someone offers to split a million dollars with us if we give them our bank account number.

So the apostles are still believing in their hearts that all of this is “too good to be true.” Jesus tries one more physical demonstration to show who he is. He asks them if they have any food; lit., “Do you have anything edible?” Or, in the context, it’s almost like, “Do you have any leftovers?” Thus, we can see that the apostles had just recently eaten. Jesus eats a piece of fish, further showing that it is him and not a ghost.

That softens up the apostles a little more, and then Jesus tells them that everything that was written about him in the Scriptures (i.e., OT) was being fulfilled. That includes scriptures from all of the 3 divisions of the OT, according to the way the Jews classify them – the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Here Luke uses the Psalms as a stand-in for all the Writings, and this verse is the only one in the Bible to specifically mention this 3-fold division of the OT.

Yes, Jesus had been telling the Twelve all during his earthly ministry about this very topic, but they never fully “got it”. So Jesus opens up their minds so that they see all of these connections. We also see an account of this in John 12:16 – the disciples not “getting” it until Jesus comes to his glory. So now, finally, the apostles are not fearful, nor are they bound by an attitude of “too good to be true;” they understand what Jesus has been trying to tell them.

**46 [Jesus] told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.**

Now that the apostles have understood Jesus’ message, what remains for them to do? They are now witnesses to the resurrection of the Messiah. It is now their job to preach “repentance for the forgiveness of sins”, and starting from Jerusalem, to preach to “all nations.” This command of Jesus is similar to what we read at the end of Matthew’s gospel – make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We are centuries away from the time of Jesus’ first followers; terrible wars have been fought, countries have risen and fallen, new worlds have been discovered, and technology continues its steady advance. So what can we modern folks possibly have in common with these ancient people?

Well, interestingly, almost everything that matters. We still fear the unknown – it just takes different forms over the years, generations, and centuries. We still have cynicism in our hearts, because we’ve experienced the way the world works. But how do we deal with these forces that discourage and paralyze us? Through the love that we have for each other, which in turn comes from the love we receive from Jesus Christ.

Yes, the earliest Christians (at least some of them) had the advantage of seeing Jesus in the flesh and some even got to see him in his resurrected body. But we have the advantage of seeing how the Church has flourished and how the message about the Cross has become established all around the world.

The outside world is concerned with power, consumption, and greed. The Church is about love and forgiveness and serving. How could this message of gentleness and sharing thrive in a culture devoted to selfishness and violence? Only through our Lord Jesus.

Jesus, through the Cross and Empty Tomb, showed his love for all creation, and we continue to spread that love today, whenever we worship and share with each other. No need to fear, Jesus is here. Believe it, my friends. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen.