Sometimes I wonder how much I should discuss the wacky theories that exist within the church. It’s not that I don’t trust you and think that if you hear them, you might go off and join a UFO cult in San Diego. Rather, I am not sure they are worth the energy. The theories can be the Christian equivalent of a George Clooney film festival – they take up time and nothing much is gained in the process. And the fact of the matter is most of the wacky theories are not new and generally tell you more about the person who came up with them than they do about Jesus. One of the reasons we know that wacky theories have been around for a while is because of passages like we have in Luke today. Let me start with the passage and then explain at least part of the reason it is in the Bible, besides its having happened. The passage says, “Jesus himself stood among the disciples and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’”

So, the situation is this: Jesus has risen from the dead and appears to the disciples but in so doing he clarifies something. And the something he clarifies for those who witness the Resurrection is that he did not come back like Casper the friendly ghost, but was raised bodily. There is substance and physicality to his resurrected state. Now to my mind the claim as we read it in Luke’s Gospel is either to be believed or not. Either we believe that Jesus was raised bodily or we say that Mary Magdalene and the Apostles cooked up a tremendous lie for some reason. We either believe in the physical resurrection or we say it did not happen and get on with our lives. But here is where we get to the wacky theories because there are people who want to have it both ways. They want the Disciples, or at least those who wrote the Gospels, to be liars but also want Jesus to be an important dude. I don’t want to go into all the theories people have concocted but I did promise you a few so let me at least do that. So here goes. The first theory goes directly against what we have in Luke’s Gospel and says that Jesus did come back as a ghost like that librarian in the first Ghostbusters movie. This is big with Gnostics who want to separate the spiritual from the physical. There is another theory which posits that Jesus was around bodily for the disciples to see but he was never really killed. He just kind of passed out on the cross and woke up three days late like he had been on some tremendous bender. A more modern theory which seems to take its lead from a PBS kids show posits that Jesus really died and afterwards the disciples were all sitting around swapping stories about the good times they had had and pretty soon it seemed like Jesus was really alive. That is, they used the power of make believe to make Jesus seem truly present. I could go on but you get the idea. And I think it is because of silliness like this that Jesus wanted to emphasize that he was physically there and that he had really been dead. And as we know, even with all this, people still try to say something else happened. But it happened in the way the Gospels’ present it so let’s leave these misguided individuals and see why we need the physical resurrection.

The physical resurrection is important for a whole host of reasons but I have a limited amount of time so let me just focus on two. And those two reasons are, first, the physical resurrection demonstrates the restoration of creation and, second, it demonstrates the conquering of death.

So, first off, what do I mean by restoration of creation? To understand that we need to go back to the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth. If you recall after God finished creating something the text says, “And God saw that it was good.” That is the original state of the physical world – it was good. We all know what happens next, Adam and Eve sin and one of the ramifications of that action is the corruption of creation. In Genesis God gives a list of things that go wrong including enmity between Adam and Eve and the ground bringing forth thorns and thistles. The world was created to be good and to be in harmony with God but through sin we get a dog’s breakfast of acrimony and dissonance. And, if the sin of Adam and Eve is the moment where it all starts to go wrong the Resurrection is when things start go the other way. If you want it in poetic language, it is when the center begins to hold again. The Resurrection, by doing something about sin, begins the path to restoration. It has started to move creation back to what it was originally intended. And this idea is completely tied to the fact that Jesus came back physically, not as a ghost or as a spiritual being. If Jesus was just spirit there would not be a restoration of what was created. The physical resurrection demonstrates that God cares about the physical, that is he cares about His original creation. People like to think of religion as being spiritual and it is, but it is not spiritual to the exclusion of the physical. If it was then Jesus wasted a lot of time on the resurrection. Jesus by coming back with flesh and bones tells us that the ultimate end of for the Christian is not to escape this world and go live in spirit land it is instead what we read in Revelation 21. There will be “a new heaven and a new earth.” Christ’s resurrection is the beginning of the restoration of creation to the way in which God created it to be, a place where creation and creator live together in harmony.

The second thing I want to touch on kind of goes along with this restoration of creation but I separate it to make the point more emphatically and that is the Resurrection shows the destruction of death. Again, going back to the fall as found in Genesis one thing God says after sin enters the world is that line we say on Ash Wednesday, “you are dust and to dust you shall return.” But this was not part of the original plan. In the original plan, there was no death because death is a corruption of the good that God created. It was all just supposed to keep going. And as I have said the New Testament goes to great pains to demonstrate that Jesus was not a ghost or spirit -- he breaths on the disciples, he eats food, he tells people to touch his wounds. This is the opposite of being dust and returning to dust – it is eternal life but eternal life in the way that God intended for it to be. It is life where physical corruption has been broken. It is the eternal life that God established in the beginning. And in death we are not escaping creation but are rather drawn into the perfect creation. Death was destroyed because the fall of man was destroyed.

Now just to wrap up. Obviously, you can look around and see that the fall is still with us, I mean New Kids on the Block are releasing a new album next month. And the reason we still see evidence of the fall is because we are living between the beginning of the restoration and the end. As we say in the eucharistic prayer Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. When Christ comes again there will be the new heaven and the new earth and we will be God’s own this day and forevermore.