

Raising the dead, with and without hope

by [Kelly J. Baker](#)

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As Easter approaches, raising the dead is at the forefront of my mind. But I think of a different vision of resurrected dead, zombies. The popular monsters reanimate as gruesome bodies; their essential natures, spirits, or souls are absent. Zombies are a reckoning of the horror of the dead coming back to life. Their shambling presence is a cruel mimicry of the living.

Some claim that Jesus was a zombie. Easter becomes [Zombie Jesus Day](#), a time to reflect on the living dead and eat lots of chocolate. With these monsters, however, resurrection is tragic. Hope disappears.

In February, Walter Williams made [national news](#) when he came back to life. He died at his home under care of a hospice nurse and his family. When the coroner checked Williams's body, he found no pulse. Williams was placed in a body bag and delivered to Porter and Sons Funeral Home in Lexington, Mississippi. While on the embalming table, he began to kick and breathe. The coroner [proclaimed](#) that Williams's return to life was a miracle from God. His daughter, Mary, later affirmed that God brought her father back to life because of his faith. Not surprisingly, the unexplained event garnered much attention. Was this an example of the miraculous? Was this an act of God? It was for Williams's family as they gained something that other families often wish for, a little more time with the departed. Sadly, the 78-year-old [died](#) two weeks later of natural causes.

While Williams's return appears an isolated incident, some evangelicals seek to [raise the dead](#) as a part of their healing ministries. Following the example of Jesus and the exhortation to raise the dead (Matt. 10:8), the participants pray over the recently departed to bring them back to life. One such ministry, Global Awakening, [centers](#) on physical healing. Raising the dead, then, becomes an extension of their healing message. A recent documentary, [Deadraiser](#), follows a variety of Christians who attempt resurrection.

Resurrection, however, is a tricky business for people past and present. Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910), the founder of Christian Science, thought resurrection was possible. Eddy believed that Christian Scientists could move beyond the sinful material world and uncover the true spiritual nature of God and humans. Following the example of Jesus, Christian Scientists hoped to heal the sick, exorcise demons, and raise the dead. Eddy suggested that Jesus was the first to realize that humans were spiritual beings trapped in matter. In *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (1875), she wrote, “Spirit is immortal Truth; matter is mortal error. Spirit is real and eternal; matter is the unreal and temporal.” The material world ensnares us and obscures our inherent spiritual nature. Jesus performed feats that seemed miraculous because he recognized his spiritual connection to God. Once Christian Scientists untangled themselves from matter, they would be able to heal like Jesus did.

After Eddy's death in 1910, the Church of Christ, Scientist, supposedly installed a phone in Eddy's tomb in case of her resurrection. Unsurprisingly, this rumor proves false. The [true story](#) is more pragmatic. At Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, her casket resided in the receiving tomb while her grave was prepared. A guard stood there to prevent vandalism, and the phone was there for contacting the guard. All that aside, the image of Eddy's telephone is a reminder of the hopeful nature of her ministry. Maybe Eddy would reappear. Maybe she wouldn't. The phone would be there waiting either way.

The raising of the dead, in Christian Science and current ministries, evokes a hope that death can be defeated. Yet zombies remain the cautionary tale that resurrections might be awful rather than awe-filled.

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