

April 14, 2024  
Third Sunday of Easter, Year B  
Grace Church, Muncie  
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

*Acts 3:12-19*

*Psalm 4*

*1 John 3:1-7*

*Luke 24:36b-48*

Alleluia! Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

In today's gospel, Jesus asks, *Do you have anything here to eat?* It is remarkable how many post-resurrection stories involve food. The Collect this morning reminds us of the story of the two people on the road to Emmaus when, even after hours of conversation while walking with Jesus, they recognized him only in the breaking of the bread. This morning's gospel takes place immediately after those two raced back from Emmaus to Jerusalem to tell the others that they had seen Jesus!

Now, just imagine what's been happening. This is still the evening of the Resurrection, the first Easter – the *first*, first day of the week. The disciples are huddled together in grief and fear, when two of their friends show up, out of breath, to tell them that they've seen Jesus. Risen. Alive. And seven miles away. What must they have thought? That they'd had too much wine with dinner? Would you believe a story like that?

Then, who shows up but Jesus himself, saying "Peace be with you," and scaring the stuffing out of them! Then he shows the disciples his hands and his feet. And still they stand there, full of joy, but even so, dumbfounded and disbelieving. Until ...

Until Jesus asks, "do you have anything here to eat?" And someone had sense enough to offer him a piece of fish, which he eats. In some translations, Jesus is also given a piece of a honeycomb ... which he also eats.<sup>1</sup>

This is important, because eating is something that a spirit or a ghost just couldn't do. But a real, fleshly Jesus could, and would, and did. Then, and only then, do the disciples believe that the Jesus they see is no ghost, but really, truly, alive.

Next to breathing, eating is probably the most common human act. Our hunger reminds us, several times a day, that we are human – with needs. Maybe eating the fish proves that Jesus is not a ghost – and we should leave well enough alone. Or, we could see, in this action, the risen Jesus offering to us an affirmation of the body's deep-rooted

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 24:42 (KJV) And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb.

significance. In other words, God loves bodies. So, let's think about Incarnation for a moment.

In the Collect for the Second Sunday after Christmas Day, we pray:

*O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity.*

To share the dignity of our humanity. To be human is to be embodied, and to have a body is to eat and to hunger, to feel the pleasure of spring flowers and the annoyance of seasonal allergies, to feel love and to experience loss. To be embodied is to be vulnerable, subject to death and yet made for the endlessness of God's life.

Jesus eating fish (and, perhaps, honey) in the Upper Room that evening demonstrates to us the fullness of the incarnation in the resurrection. The empty tomb itself proved nothing – only that there was a missing body.

It is through the resurrection that Jesus, scars and all, ushers us into life with God. It is through the resurrection that the dignity of our human nature is *yet more wonderfully restored!* This is what John says in today's Epistle: *See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are* (1 John 3:1). If there was ever a place for an Amen, it is there.

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Jesus told the disciples, *Behold my hands and my feet, see that it is I myself.* Me. The one you know. The one you love. The one you trust. Well, then, what about us? Do we know and love and trust? Do we each “need” the resurrection? After all, to us “modern” people, it can seem a little bit unfashionable – just a diversion from the harsher aspects of reality.

In 1964, John Updike (1932-2009) wrote a poem for a religious arts festival sponsored by the Clifton Lutheran Church, of Marblehead, MA. It is called *Seven Stanzas at Easter*. I commend the entire poem to you, but here's just the first stanza of the seven.

Make no mistake: if He rose at all  
it was as His body;  
if the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules  
reknit, the amino acids rekindle,  
the Church will fall.

What about you? Do you need the bodily resurrection? My colleague Debie Thomas writes, “I can tell you that I need Jesus's bodily resurrection precisely because I,

too, am embodied... Because I am a human being, every experience I have of the holy is grounded in my physical being, in my body.

“And so, I need a Savior with a body like mine — a body that is frail, profoundly vulnerable to forces beyond my control. A body that is, for the most part, defenseless against injury, violence, illness, injustice, and cruelty. A body that might die, as Jesus himself died, too soon, and out of season.

“I need a God who resurrects bodies. I need a God who shares the dignity of our human nature, experiencing the senseless damage so often enacted against human flesh. A God who can declare with absolute authority that our endings in the here and now are not The End.

“For me, (she concludes) the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's perfect promise of compassion *and* justice: everything that has been taken, broken, mistreated, wronged, and forgotten, will be restored...more wonderfully restored.”<sup>2</sup>

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Jesus said, *Behold my hands and my feet*. These were the same hands and feet with which he ministered: healing people, breaking bread, constantly on the go, teaching and proclaiming the Kingdom of Heaven. Now, wounded and bruised, these same hands and feet are proof to the disciples that he had gone through the danger and not around it.

We spend a lot of time and energy finding ways around things, rather than learning how to live *through* them. It makes perfect sense. Who wants to experience pain or danger? It's painful, and it feels dangerous.

We don't want to come face to face with the suffering of other people, or the suffering of the planet. Not to mention the secret sufferings each one of us carries.

But here's the thing. By being raised from the grave, Jesus has shown us the way through the danger – that way is himself. The grave is still the grave, but it has lost its sting. Physical death is still death, but it is now swallowed up in victory.

Jesus has shown us all these things, and now relies on us to be his witnesses. Just as he commissioned the disciples that night in the upper room, today he calls on us to be his witnesses, to serve as his hands and feet in the world.

*Do you have anything here to eat?* Taking up of the work of Jesus, of going through the danger and not around it, requires us to be well fed. So, it's a good thing that we're in the middle of the 50-day Feast of Easter!

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<sup>2</sup> Deep thanks to Debie Thomas, for these thoughts from her essay, “Embodied” April 11, 2021. <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay>

We all know that the smells and tastes of the table can take you to places you didn't expect and to memories you couldn't recall on your own. I want you to think for a moment about how it is that you know that a batch of brownies at a family gathering was actually made by your grandmother, not by one of your relatives, using her recipe. How? You just *know*...in the eating.

In the same way, the breaking of bread at Emmaus, the bit of broiled fish in the upper room, the table of this Altar, all remind us of the deep connection between eating and knowing.

As Cleopas and his companion discovered on that evening in Emmaus, the presence of Christ abides whenever his followers gather to break bread. Christ's presence among us in this Eucharist reminds us that he is living among us, in this very room. Through this knowing, God puts gladness in our hearts, especially when our days feel full of confusion, and bitterness, and grief.

The story of the resurrection is a story of incarnation, of embodiment, through and through. It's a story of hands and feet, of scars and hungers, of skin and bone. "Touch me and see" is the invitation that you and I receive today, to see and know the risen Lord at this table.

It is an invitation that is trustworthy. It is an invitation that endures. And because you are witnesses of these things, it is an invitation that is now yours to extend. To all bodies, for all time.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*