

Third Sunday of Easter (b)
Acts 3:12-19 1 John 3:1-7 Luke 24:36b-48
St. John's Lutheran Church, Grove City OH
April 18, 2021 (Traditional)

You notice, practically everything we just heard in the Gospel lesson emphasizes the physicality of the resurrected Jesus. He's been raised from the dead, and now he's there in the body. "Touch me," he tells the disciples. "A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have," he says. And then, to top it off, he gets hungry and asks them, "do you have anything here to eat?" They give him a piece of fish and Jesus starts munching on it. Obviously the gospel wants us to know that the resurrected Jesus has bones, blood, skin, nerves, muscles, a brain, a stomach, and teeth.

In the Creed, we say, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." The apostles understood this is crucial, it's central to our faith, that Jesus is resurrected not just in some spiritual way, but physically—the whole person. Jesus was not suddenly split in two so his spirit could leave his body behind in the tomb. I remember in my first congregation, one of my congregation members told me it would not bother him if somehow archaeologists could prove that they had found the bones of Jesus somewhere in Palestine. He said something like, "the spiritual truth of the resurrection would remain." In as gentle a way as possible, I responded that a resurrection without the body would mean the end of Christian faith. This would all be worthless religion without the resurrection of the body. We'd just become another spiritualized sect, like all the others floating around out there in the world. If there was not resurrection of the body, I would have definitely not have wasted my time with religion that's all just about ideas and spiritual, supernatural stuff, and nothing to do with the reality—the people, places and things and events that are right in front of me.

Notice how Jesus shows the disciples his hands and his feet first. He shows them where he got hurt...where the soldiers had driven the nails. That's the first thing he wants his followers to see so they can recognize him as their old master. He doesn't do any fancy miracles when he appears to them—no acts of divine power. No—he shows them where he was most hurt, most wounded, most vulnerable, most human. There is nothing ghostly or supernatural or unworldly about him. When he eats the broiled fish, it's such a normal, homey, human, physical thing to do. And I get the feeling, that's the last thing the disciples expect. They are ready to believe in something uncanny and magical and weird--they are ready to believe in a ghost. But they are not ready to believe quickly in a risen, flesh and blood Jesus, who will eat a meal with them, who still has wounds on his hands and feet.

What does it mean to believe in the resurrection of the body? It means you believe in a God who lives close to you, who speaks to you in and through flesh, who shows you his wounds, and who shares a meal with you and your brothers and sisters regularly in the church.

There was a time when I personally was fascinated by all things mysterious. Anything that had to do with dreams and visions, predicting the future, miracles, e.s.p., ghosts and spirits, communicating with the dead—anything like that—I get it. Human beings are drawn to that stuff.

But here's the thing: Sometimes we start believing that the truth simply cannot be right in front of us. Sometimes we start believing that we have to see behind the everyday stuff of this world in a special way that other people can't see, in order to see things clearly. But the thing about Christian faith is that the basic supernatural truth is not hidden. It's a power, a life, a love, that happens to us. Jesus gives it to us. It is as elemental, it is as real, it is as simple and touchable, as bread and wine in your mouth.

You don't need to see in a special way, you don't need to be a special person, to receive the supernatural truth of Christianity. Obviously this is going to frustrate anyone who wants to stand out on the basis of their own wisdom, talents or intelligence. This of course will frustrate anyone who wants to be admired. We Christians don't take much stock in being admired by others. We're just grateful today for what God has come to give us.

I know it might sound strange at first, but one of the most common things we Christians do in our everyday relationship with God is to try and make him into a special mystery--a ghost, a supernatural mysterious being who only speaks to the religious, supernatural side of us. But as Jesus tells his disciples: He is not a ghost. How many times have we thought of our faith as having to do with just *one* side of our lives--the "spiritual" side--while everything else--work, school, politics, science, money--belongs to the secular or "non-spiritual" side?

We try to make God fit into a particular place in our lives...a so called "spiritual" place. But you know what that means? It just means we're trying to push him out of other places in our lives, where we have our own plans. When we try to fit God into a particular place, that's when we make him into a special mystery: a bodiless ghost that we might be fascinated with at certain times. But that's a ghost we know we don't really have to answer to when we go to work in the morning.

When we say "I believe in the resurrection of the body," that's where faith hits the road for us as Christians. We are saying that yes, my God does go with me to work in the morning. God does involve himself in the ups and downs of world history and in my life. God is standing in the middle of the political circus, just like Jesus stood there on the last day of his life. He is involved with the way I make and use my money, God is alive and

speaking to me through my spouse, my children, my acquaintances and sometimes even through my enemies.

A ghost is something that flies around in an attic. Sometimes we'd like to keep God there. But a God who lives in the everyday stuff....a God who greets us every day in flesh and blood...is a God we cannot avoid. He's a God who refuses to be pushed out of our work and our struggles and our finances. A resurrected Lord who shares our flesh with us--who shares in all these things with us—*he is the God who saves us.*

We know there's nothing ghostly or unreal about the pains, the sicknesses, the hard work, we experience in this world. There's nothing ghostly about a pandemic, or the power of evil and war and starvation in the world. There's nothing ghostly about the people in our lives who are in pain right now. Your suffering neighbor does not need any high-fallutin' ideas or explanations about God. He doesn't need some unsubstantial ghost. That person needs to be able to touch and see the body of Christ. That person needs you to be there today. They need you and me to love them with the love of Christ.

So many streams of religion, including some strands of Christianity, look for God only in miracles, only in unexplainable events, only in happy feelings. But when you believe in the resurrection of the body, you know that God will do anything to be physical. He will do anything to be here and now and simple. He will do anything to be personally involved in the suffering of the world. He has gone to hell just so we know that that he intends to speak and work through people. He will make sinners holy today, he will bring healing today out of suffering, he will bring life out of death, not just when we die, but today. When *you* bring God's good news to someone, when you bring his healing, his love, his forgiveness, into another person's life, there's nothing ghostly or mysterious about it...right? *That just happened...*through you. The power of the resurrection is the

same way. It happens. God brings it to you, works it in you, and gives it to others through you.

As believers, we don't need more ghosts and spirits and e.s.p., dreams, secret knowledge, or amazing visions. We don't need to put our trust in any person or group who presents itself as having the miracle solution to the world's problems and the key to heaven. Why? Because we see that heaven has come to us through the cross, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The cross is God's answer to our search for life on our terms. It's where he says stop. In the middle of your struggles, your worries, your wounds. He's found you. He promises you that all the wounds will be his. Take the simple food he gives to you. In Jesus Christ, the future is yours. The kingdom is yours.