

The Third Sunday of Easter, April 18, 2021

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What about the Body?

Luke 24:36–49

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Jesus Himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, He said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave Him a piece of broiled fish, and He took it and ate before them (vv 36b–43).

Here’s a quick recap of the past two weeks.

On Easter, in the Gospel reading, we went to the tomb with the women. We found the tomb empty but heard two angels announce: **“You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; He isn’t here”** (Mk 16:5–6).

And we began to wonder, “What about the body?”

Last Sunday, again in the Gospel reading, we gathered with the disciples behind locked doors. Jesus appeared to them and **showed them His hands and His side** (John 20:20). A week later He appeared again, this time especially for Thomas (see 20:27–28).

And we continued to ask, “What about the body?”

Easter raises all sorts of questions about the body, such as: Where is it? Is it the same body that was crucified? Is the body real and totally alive? And just what does the resurrection of the body mean for us and our bodies? All this is summed up in today’s question: What about the body? Today we see that

**HAVING RISEN FROM THE DEAD AND BEING TOTALLY ALIVE IN THE BODY
JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING FOR OUR BODIES, TOO.**

I.

So what about the body?

First, we mean the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. The very same body that was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. *That* body. It's not in the tomb, as the women discovered early on Easter morning before the crocuses had opened. And Jesus is not dead—no longer dead. He appeared to Mary Magdalene near the garden tomb. He walked with the two disciples on the dusty road to Emmaus. He passed through locked doors to join the disciples in the upper room, saying, **“Peace to you!”** (v 36). These were eyewitnesses and earwitnesses of Jesus' resurrection, and so were many others.

If that's not enough—and let's be honest, believing in the resurrection isn't easy, not for the disciples and not for us—we're happy for more, so Luke gives us more. His details focus on the physical nature of the resurrection. Luke is unambiguous. There's nothing vague, shadowy, or uncertain about it. When Jesus came to the disciples, **they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit**, a ghost (v 37). Not for the first time. They'd also thought they saw a spirit when Jesus walked across the Sea of Galilee while they were struggling in a boat against the wind and the waves. It's far easier to believe in ghosts and spirits than in anyone risen from the dead. Just ask the average person on the street. That was just as true then as it is now. They weren't any more gullible than we are.

Now consider the physical details. It starts with Jesus' own words: **“See My hands and My feet, that it's I Myself. I AM Myself! Touch Me and see. For a spirit doesn't have flesh and bones as you see that I have”** (v 39). First there are words. Words are physical: vocal chords vibrating air waves that reach ear drums. Then an invitation to touch. Jesus isn't tactile defensive. During His ministry, He touched lepers and sinners and dead bodies and made them well. Now He offers that same bodily touch to those who doubt and fear. Real flesh. Real bones. Not destroyed, decayed, or dried out. Then come His actions. **When He'd said this, He showed them His hands and His feet** (v 40). Why His hands and feet? Because that's where the scars are! To show that this is the very same body whose holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death has redeemed us—we who were lost and condemned. Finally, if simply hearing from Jesus and looking at His body aren't proof enough, there's my favorite part. Jesus **said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”** (v 41). What's more a part of bodily existence than eating? Parents know what I'm talking about. Children are always asking for food! The body makes its needs known. So **they gave Him a piece of broiled fish, and He took it** and did what no spirit could ever do: **He ate before them** (vv 42–43).

The point is clear. This was no spiritual or metaphorical resurrection. There's nothing symbolic about it. The body which had been dead was now alive and well—even a little hungry. When Jesus broke down the bars of death and hell on Easter, He didn't leave the body behind. He took it with Him. He has it still. He *is* His body and His body *is* Him. This is what we Christians mean when we say, "The third day He rose again." The resurrection isn't an idea, just as the crucifixion isn't an idea. A real man bled on a real cross for our all-too-real sins and then on a real Sunday morning rose again for real. Other religions may downplay the body, but not Christianity. Jesus doesn't put the body down. He raises it up—raises it up and takes it to new places!

II.

That leads us to ask again: What about the body—our bodies? Jesus' physical resurrection was good for Him, but what does it matter for us?

We have such strange and tortured relationships with our bodies. On the one hand, we love our bodies. We pamper them. We take care of the. We indulge their cravings. We place a high value on comfort, appearance, and health. We will go to great lengths to avoid pain and sickness. On the other hand, we're also in conflict with our bodies. They aren't what we want them to be. They don't do what we want them to do. We harm them, abuse them, mistreat them. We park our bodies for hours in front of screens and let them waste away. We are tempted to fill them with alcohol, drugs, and who knows what else. We overeat. We starve ourselves. We try to change the body or escape from it. Our bodies age and fall apart. In so many ways, we are at war with the body, not at home in it.

Then comes the resurrection of Jesus. In the body. He spent so much of His ministry restoring bodies, healing them, and making them whole. Now He puts an exclamation point on the significance of the body by rising from the dead. What He did, the apostles do also. A lame man leaps for joy when Peter and John tell Him to walk in the name of Jesus. You are made for life in the body, and the body is made for you, and Jesus rose from the dead to reconcile and restore our bodies. He put His own body on the line for you and me—for your body and for my body. He suffered the bodily discipline and death that we deserve. He paid the price for our sins of the body. And then He rose again in the body.

So we believe in the resurrection of the body—of Jesus, yes, but His was only the beginning. We look for the resurrection of the dead—of all the dead—including ourselves and our loved ones. Scripture makes it clear that Jesus is the first to be raised, but not the only one and not the last. After Him will rise all who die, and those who die

in Him will rise to life in Him. **Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ** (1 Cor 15:23). When Jesus returns, St. John writes, **we shall be like Him** (1 Jn 3:2). Whatever dislocation or disease we feel now about the body will be gone. We will be at home in flesh and bone, with hands and feet, leaping for joy and lifting voices in praise to God. You were made for that.

The physical resurrection of Jesus signals our own. For more than a year humanity has been confronted by the reality of death. The promise we have in Christ is good news. As a fellow pastor recently wrote, “Christian hope isn’t based on inoculation or herd immunity. It isn’t subject to the vicissitudes of variants or vaccines. Instead, we find hope and strength in the promise of our own physical resurrection. This promise invites us to live courageously. If the pandemic doesn’t get us, something else will. [But] this doesn’t lead us to be cavalier, but rather confident and caring toward others. This promise frees us to serve others in word and deed, to sacrifice for others and put their physical needs ahead of our own.”ⁱ

III.

I want to close, then, with three implications and applications for our lives.

The first is this: Live as a body that has a future. No matter how old or broken down your body is, it has a future. So use your body for good, especially for the good of those around you. Don’t be stingy. Don’t spend your days in self-protection and isolation. Love with your body, serve with your body, and sacrifice your body.

The second is this, and it has to do with the end of life: Because we believe in the resurrection of the body, we make the clearest confession of our hope by burying the bodies of those who have died. There’s no question that God can raise *every* body from the dead, even a body that has been burned or lost at sea—God can raise a body, no matter where it is or what state it’s in, but what better way to express to others what we believe than by planting the bodies of those die in the ground. What is buried is perishable, but what will rise is imperishable. It’s like putting a seed into the ground.

And the third has to do with worship. It’s significant that risen Jesus so often appears and shares a meal with the disciples. Remember how He asked them for something to eat! Holy Communion is the meal that risen Jesus now shares with us. For our bodies, He gives His true body and His true blood. Receiving the gifts of Christ and worshipping Him involve our bodies as well. We confess what we believe with our bodies. For over a year now we’ve been doing things a bit differently, but now it’s time to reflect what we believe by what we do. So, starting in two weeks on the first Sunday in May at the 11:00 am service, and then in the other services at a later date, we’re returning to communion

at the altar rail—you can remain standing if you wish—and also to communion with the chalice, for those who so desire.

Finally, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the time is coming when Christ will restore all things, including our bodies, as God intended them to be. Though we may not feel at home in the body yet, we are at home with Jesus now and we will be fully at home in the body when He returns in glory.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7

ⁱ Article by Pastor Peter Nafzger, <https://www.1517.org/articles/gospel-luke-2436-49-easter-3-series-b>