

## April 19, 2015

Acts 3:12-19

12 Seeing this, Peter addressed the people: "You Israelites, why are you amazed at this? Why are you staring at us as if we made him walk by our own power or piety? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of our ancestors—has glorified his servant Jesus. This is the one you handed over and denied in Pilate's presence, even though he had already decided to release him. 14 You rejected the holy and righteous one, and asked that a murderer be released to you instead. 15 You killed the author of life, the very one whom God raised from the dead. We are witnesses of this. 16 His name itself has made this man strong. That is, because of faith in Jesus' name, God has strengthened this man whom you see and know. The faith that comes through Jesus gave him complete health right before your eyes. 17 "Brothers and sisters, I know you acted in ignorance. So did your rulers. 18 But this is how God fulfilled what he foretold through all the prophets: that his Christ would suffer. 19 Change your hearts and lives! Turn back to God so that your sins may be wiped away.

Psalm 4

1 Answer me when I cry out, my righteous God! Set me free from my troubles! Have mercy on me! Listen to my prayer! 2 How long, you people, will my reputation be insulted? How long will you continue to love what is worthless and go after lies? Selah 3 Know this: the LORD takes personal care of the faithful. The LORD will hear me when I cry out to him. 4 So be afraid, and don't sin! Think hard about it in your bed and weep over it! Selah 5 Bring righteous offerings, and trust the LORD! 6 Many people say, "We can't find goodness anywhere. The light of your face has left us, LORD!" 7 But you have filled my heart with more joy than when their wheat and wine are everywhere! 8 I will lie down and fall asleep in peace because you alone, LORD, let me live in safety.

1 John 3:1-7

1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us in that we should be called God's children, and that is what we are! Because the world didn't recognize him, it doesn't recognize us. 2 Dear friends, now we are God's children, and it hasn't yet appeared what we will be. We know that when he appears we will be like him because we'll see him as he is. 3 And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure. 4 Every person who practices sin commits an act of rebellion, and sin is rebellion. 5 You know that he appeared to take away sins, and there is no sin in him. 6 Every person who remains in relationship to him does not sin. Any person who sins has not seen him or known him. 7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you. The person who practices righteousness is righteous, in the same way that Jesus is righteous.

Luke 24:36b-48

36 While they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 37 They were terrified and afraid. They thought they were seeing a ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you startled? Why are doubts arising in your hearts? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It's really me! Touch me and see, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones like you see I have." 40 As he said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 Because they were wondering and questioning in the midst of their happiness, he said to them, "Do you have anything to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece

of baked fish. 43 Taking it, he ate it in front of them. 44 Jesus said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. 46 He said to them, "This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.

## Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Father,  
God's Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit:  
Amen.

I love this story in Luke. LOVE IT. Jesus sneaks up on the disciples, apparently using his newly resurrected body on stealth mode. Already talking to one another about the fact that Jesus appeared already in a few different places, Jesus decides to spring the surprise on everyone at once as he declares, "Peace be with you." Peace, Jesus? Peace! You're dead, or at least you were, but now you're alive and you're just popping up in the midst of us, saying peace?!?! And then, of all things, he

eats our fish. He scares us then he takes our snacks!

What's is this resurrected Jesus all about?

Now there's a question worth asking. What's this resurrected Jesus all about? For the next five weeks, the rest of this Easter season, we're going to look at the resurrection, and in particular, ask how the resurrection works to shape our daily life. What we'll see is that the resurrection has meaning in each aspect of our lives, that, in Jesus, we become a truly new humanity.

What we see today is that the resurrection is all about the body. Each week, we say a creed, whether the Apostles', the slightly longer Nicene, or the tome-like Athanasian, that offers a statement of belief about our common faith. Each of the creeds

accepted by Christians worldwide includes something like the following lines, which come from the Apostles' Creed: *We believe in the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.* These words seem to roll off of our tongues quite easily, especially for those of us who grew up with this ritual. But, do we believe this? Do we believe that everlasting life will include our resurrected bodies? That not only Jesus' body, but our bodies will be the physical, fleshy things that we've lived in for so long?

All too often, we speak as though the resurrection is only of our souls or spirits or some kind of ghoulish specter of our former selves. We imagine that life after death is more like Jacob Marley in A

Christmas Carol or, even more frighteningly, like Patrick Swayze in Ghost. But in Luke we find the real resurrection is much more like Jesus, flesh and blood, hungry and feasting with his friends on the seashore. For some reason, we talk like our bodies aren't a central part of ourselves. But they are.

They are! Think of what your life would be like without a body. You'd never know the warmth of a winter fire, or the cool splash of an ocean wave on a hot summer day. The taste of your favorite food? Gone forever. The feel of a friend's hug? Never known. We would never know the pungent beauty of a flower's scent, never hear the liberation that spirituals brought to enslaved Africans on the underground railroad. We'd never see the Northern

lights or the brightness in the eyes of our children.

Bodies allow us to sense each of these things. In fact, we require bodies to sense all things. We are bodily creatures, and intentionally so! Remember that God made us of the earth, the dirt. Remember that the word Adam is actually a Hebrew word for “earth creatures,” for creatures of clay. We creatures of clay are embodied souls, spiritual and physical twined together.

And to show us this, after his resurrection, Jesus eats some fish. This seemingly insignificant event is one of those narrative details, those story pieces, that carries volumes worth of theology in only a few brief words. Jesus even encourages the disciples to touch

and see since ghosts don't have flesh and bones,  
and he does.

What might the disciples have thought if Jesus hadn't let them touch him? If he hadn't eaten some food? That he was just that. A ghost. You may remember the character Casper the Friendly Ghost? One of my favorite scenes in the 1998 movie version of Casper is when three ghosts begin to chow down at the dinner table... Or so it seems. As the camera pans behind the trio, we see that the food falls undigested through their mouths and directly to the floor. Ghosts, nonphysical beings, don't need food, and in fact, couldn't handle food! Jesus knows this and so he eats as a sign of the physical resurrection, that he's not only a spirit, but a body.

But it's not just any old body, right? It's not like he traded in his base model for the new version with heated seats and a moonroof. This is his body, the same body that hung on the cross. That's why the marks of the crucifixion are so important. This body, the body in which Jesus meets the disciples, is the body that Mary bore. This is the body that walked the sands time and the soil of Israel for thirty years. The body that called the disciples out of their boats and led them to see the Kingdom of God. The body that healed other bodies, that forgave other bodies, that raised Lazarus' body from the dead. This is the body that lived and died and rose again, all in the flesh.

This undercuts that popular conception that we will one day leave our bodies behind. The

resurrection is not an escape from this body. Jesus shows this in his healed scars. The pain is gone, but the evidence endures. The suffering is no more, but the reminders remain. This is Jesus, the very same. This is the same body, and yet one totally transformed with everlasting life. The resurrection, our new life in Christ, begins with the living body of Christ.

And that, that's the key. The resurrected Jesus is all about the body, now and later. The body we have is the body we carry into eternity. Just like Jesus, we will carry our tastes, though maybe not for fish. And just like Jesus, we will carry our scars. What that means is pretty simple, and simply profound: how we use our bodies now has eternal ramifications. What we do to bodies matters.

That's an unmistakably important part of the Easter Gospel. What we do in this body shapes us for life in the resurrection. Our use and abuse of bodies, both our own bodies and those of others? That stuff forms our futures. Everything from how we discipline our children to how we kiss our spouses to how we treat the poor and whether we feed the hungry affects how we and how others, in all of our bodies, experience God's eternity. If we weekly profess a belief in the resurrection of the body, then we must begin to treat our bodies with that kind of respect that anticipates that resurrection.

How might we do this? There's a myriad of ways. First, we must stop treating our bodies as though they're disposable. This is tough in a culture of paper

plates, plastic utensils, and foam cups. We're conditioned to think everything is disposable, something we can see every time couches are left on the curb with the garbage. But these bodies are sturdier than Styrofoam. These bodies are meant for more than curbside pickup and landfill disposal.

For ourselves, we must take better care of our bodies. We ought to stop putting in so many chemicals that disrupt our body and instead find healthful foods that strengthen our bodies.

Fortunately for us our region has some great farmers markets and local produce stores to support the development of good habits. We need to stop letting laziness erode our muscles and our minds and instead find new life in activity out the in world. With the New

River, Claytor, Lake, and the parks all around we've great opportunities to restore our bodies and our minds with exploration.

But we must also stop treating other people like their bodies are disposable as well. The rise of violence in our culture tells us just how little we think of others' bodies. All too often we're quick to kill others who we don't understand or disagree with rather than finding ways to nonviolently engage with one another. Citizens and governmental forces all rely so heavily on violence that we seem to say that some bodies just don't matter, that bodies I don't understand or appreciate are bodies not worth the time to understand or appreciate, so we can be rid of them. Even if we're not talking about weapons,

the realities of human trafficking in our world speak about humanity's willingness to use and abuse bodies today, as well our general willingness to ignore that abuse. There are more people enslaved today, whether sex slavery or forms of forced labor, than at any other time in human history, and as a society we operate as though slavery is eradicated. It's not, and it is marking bodies with scars forever. We must find ways to stop the abuse of bodies and instead find ways to help shape our bodies away from violence and into the in the image of our God who brought the world a promise of peace.

To prepare for the resurrection – to live alongside Jesus – we must live the resurrection now. The resurrection is not an escape from our bodies, but the

culmination of these bodies, the perfection of this body in the fullness of God. Easter signals to us the goodness of this body, that God intends eternal life for our entire being, soul, spirit, and body. With that in mind, let us help to prepare our bodies well for God's Kingdom. Let's promote wellness. Let's liberate those oppressed and bonded by the sins of this world. Let's make habits and decisions that reflect the goodness of this body. Let's give thanks not only for our bodies, but the bodies of others, and treat them with a respect shaped by Christ's resurrected body. Let us live life well, and use these bodies to glorify the risen body of Christ. Amen.