

St. John's Episcopal Church
Hamlin, Pennsylvania
The Rev'd. Ronald Royce Miller, Ph.D.
The Third Sunday of Easter
15 April 2018

Scripture readings:

Acts 3:12-19 Psalm 4 1 John 3:1-7 Luke 24:36b-48

The psalm for today - "*Oh, that we might see better times!*" Sound familiar? Then in the gospel for today we talk about seeing Jesus in the body. One of the things that I think confounds the reception of the Christian tradition profoundly is our discussion that we'll get in the creed later, that we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. And then we have this extraordinary gospel where Jesus is again in a setting of an upper room, a private chamber, and he greets his disciples with a word that we remember that Duncan, whose funeral was yesterday, used to always say when he came into the church. He always said, "*Shalom!*" Even though I studied Hebrew in seminary and realize that it's a complex word, yesterday at the funeral I remarked that I went to the dictionary and looked it up. There are three quick and easy definitions for *Shalom*. One is *hello*, one is *peace* - and that's the kind of internal whole sense of peace and well-being. And the other is *goodbye*. So my last word was "Goodbye."

Jesus is greeting those who are closest to him after his passion, crucifixion, death and burial. Now in these post-resurrection appearances Jesus is being seen in the body in a way I hope we never see Duncan again. Imagine that! Think of what happens in a grave after we're gone. Yuk! But there is this extraordinary idea among the early Church that Jesus is seen alive and in a body. And this text makes it profoundly and plainly clear that we're not talking about visions of ghosts or spirits. There is nothing hairy-fairy about this. This is a body that asks to eat and is given a piece of broiled fish. There is another post-resurrection appearance where Jesus is seen on the beach grilling fish, and it is thought by some that the early celebrations of the Eucharist, instead of bread and wine, used fish. Imagine that. That would make things really complex.

But here is a body, a physical body, eating something. Now I have a perverse kind of mind, and I know what happens after I eat something - a day or two later. We're talking about a real body here. When I try to convince people that clergy are human, I always inform them that I have never lived in a rectory without a toilet. *[laughter]* We are talking bodies here. We're talking bodily fluids here. Digestive juices. Do you remember the uproar and furor and fear that accompanied bodily fluids in the 80s when we didn't understand AIDS? We're talking about a belief in the early Church that God lives in that silly sack of bones you saw step out of the shower this morning, covered in flesh and filled with fluids. The locus, the place, the location of God Almighty in today's world, according to the early Church, was in the body of Christ, alive and doing the business that all human beings do.

Then I reflected on our celebrations at the end of December of the Incarnation of God in the Nativity narratives about Jesus, and how we are willing so often to skip over the real business of a real baby and get carried away with all the sentimental claptrap of Rockabye Baby Jesus and Johnson and Johnson baby powder images of this cute little Jewish boy in a manger, and isn't that sweet, and forget that there were diapers to change. Eight days after the birth there was a circumcision where the kid's penis was mutilated, bled, and he screamed. Fluids, pain, the human experience, the tube within a tube. Humanity, friends.

Beyond all the Easter lilies and all the rest of it, I think we often forget that we're talking about an enfleshed God when we believe and teach and confess Jesus as the Christ. I stand with Thomas. I would like to say, "*Show me that, and I'll believe it.*" Don't get me wrong. Most of the rest of the world stands with me and Thomas. Seeing is believing.

Well, what's the future of Christianity if what we're "selling" is a 2,000-year-old myth of a magic act that suspended the natural order, and only for those who believed. You know these post-resurrection appearances last week and today are in a small room with a handful of people. I think there were thirteen of us at the 8 o'clock mass today. We're talking about a handful of people. What is the relevance of that, friends, if that's what we mean by resurrection? There may have been a really good reason that the birth narratives were added to the tradition after people started to confess Jesus as the messiah and the Risen Lord, to keep the belief grounded in the fleshly reality of God Incarnate who sweats blood and tears.

So where is that body now? Why don't I get to see it? Why don't I with Thomas get to put my finger in that nail hole and jam my hand in his side and believe. And we know that that stuff produces believing. After all, at the

cross when the centurion jammed the spear in Jesus' side, he was the one who made the confession, "*Ah, this was the Son of God!*" That's an extraordinary moment of faith, confession, recognition, belief. And it is related to an experience of a body. Well, where is the world going to get that experience today? Do you want the answer? From you and me and us together because this is the confession that's being made: that you and I together who understand ourselves to be the Church, you and I who re-member...that's an interesting word. We say remember and there's no hyphen between the *re* and the *member*. For us to remember means to recall, recollect. But you and I are in the business every time we gather here of re-remembering, putting the legs, the arms, the hands, the feet, the face, the guts, the side, the flesh, the blood, the bones back on the body of Jesus in the world today as tubes within a tube who eat fish, are nourished by it, and dump the dirt.

The Incarnation in Christmas is about a real body which cannot be killed, which body communicates as did Jesus - the truth of the love of God for all creation which is eternal. If for us the celebration of the Nativity as the Incarnation took place 2,000 years ago at the birth of a Jewish boy about which we know nothing but about which we have created a tradition, if our faith is based on the passion, crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus 2,000 years ago with which we cannot be in touch - if there is no touch, there is no Jesus, and God is not alive. The Incarnation fully and completely depends upon God being known in the substance of which we are made. We're not talking about ghosts or spirits or anything other but the human container of a living God. It's why we don't bury living bodies because as long as you and I draw breath, we are seen as possible incarnators and fleshers of the message of God's love for this world, this creation, and everybody in it. When we no longer draw breath, it no longer is our job to communicate that message. Let the dead bury the dead, but let the living continue to participate in the ongoing resurrection and re-remembering of the Body of Christ to keep a truth alive in this world which we believe and teach and confess cannot be killed.

Now in order for the world which does not meet in the upper room, in the closed chamber, behind the locked doors - and there are a lot of those folks - for the benefit of them, how are they supposed to see and touch and come to believe? The same way Thomas did, and the same way the centurion did - by having an encounter with the Body of Christ and believing that they, too, can be incorporated, embodied, become a part of re-remembering that body, as we so proudly confess on the sign outside that we welcome all people to join in that business with us, to put flesh and blood on God's eternal message of love for us, and for all people, including all of creation. That's why it's important for us to take care of the earth. That's why environmental concerns are a religious matter. That's why how we treat each other as people is a religious issue. That's why we understand that sometimes when we show this Body of Christ to the world, it will not be understood any more than Jesus was understood. It will not be acceptable to the religious community. Remember Jesus went into the synagogue? He said, "*You've got this wrong. Your money, your pigeons, your cows, your sacrifices, your burnt incense doesn't make a bit of difference to God. You make a bit of difference to God because you are God's child, and you are loved by God.*"

Now if you accept that love and don't share it, Jesus is also able to say, "*You are a hypocrite because God doesn't love you alone.*" God loves you as a member of the human family, as a part of creation, as an enfleshed being whom God loved enough to give a body which is not a dirty body but which is the temple of the Lord who lives in bodily fluids. Hard to imagine, isn't it? Well, we'll get to the altar for some fluid in a chalice in a little while, won't we?

So here is this extraordinary idea that Christ is alive in the world in a body through the silly bag of bones that we are, but well and truly and really present with a radical message for all people. Not everybody is going to agree with that. I think the post-resurrection appearances are important because in the post-resurrection appearances those who believe things about Jesus, encounter a body that has been broken, bloodied, bruised, and perforated. So when Jesus appears after the resurrection there are still holes to be seen in his hands and feet and side, thorn marks on the brow - none of which occurred without pain or suffering or bodily fluid - coming out of eyes in tears and out of wounds in blood, and water and blood came running out of his side when he was pierced on the cross.

Jesus in the post-resurrection appearances retains and shows a broken body to the faithful - which is way different from a pink Cadillac. The business of believing may lead to broken bodies - even broken hearts and broken souls. But none of that contradicts the real, un-assassinatable truth of God's love for us and the world.

And so it is that there are people who do believe differently from us. There's a bunch of folks down the road

who believe it is very important to have AK47s to protect the kingdom of God, and there is not a shred or ounce or scintilla of that in Christianity. Scriptures make the point that Jesus is a messiah who has not conquered by virtue of warfare or physical strength, but he has conquered by virtue of believing in the love of God and allowing his life to be snuffed out in the efforts to share that belief truthfully and faithfully and not violently. Killing Jesus did not kill the truth. You're here today, 2,000 years later, embodying that truth, and the joy we share is that - come what may - until our last breath, we believe we can not only experience and know but share that love of God which Jesus knew and shared with those who knew him most personally. Even after his death they came together and were able to say, *"When we share a meal..."* I heard JoAnne say this morning, *"There are only 24 hotdogs in the crock-pot for coffee hour."* I said, *"Well, we can share."*

When we come here to this altar, we come here with the objective of sharing, not organizing, but of sharing God among ourselves and in and with and throughout the world. A lot of orthodoxies - Christian orthodoxies to begin with - gluttonize the good news. That's our's. It belongs to us, and unless you agree with us, you may not share this meal. You know what I mean. I bet you do. But Jesus gave himself - flesh and blood - to feed the world and those in need. And so it is, Easter continues for us, friends - the celebration of Christ present, alive, doing the work in the world in flesh and blood, and that means yours and mine, and none of us alone but us together being the Body of Christ alive.

So when the world sees us from time to time being that body, they may see holes in our hands and our feet. They may see a slit in our side. They may see a broken body. There may be thorn wounds on the brow, but there will be a body alive, hungry to eat and share a meal, and willing to say, *"This is God's love for us and for all people."*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.