

The Body Alive



Disciples John and Peter on their way to the tomb on Easter morning by Eugène Burnand¹

Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see... (Luke 24:38-39)

In this moment of the risen Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, there is terror and confusion. Yet, even before Jesus shows up in the middle of his disciples, following his crucifixion and death, there is already a buzz of excitement, fear and confusion.

There's a lot going on! There is the empty tomb, the discovery of it by the women, the mysterious figures in the dazzling clothes, and the women going to tell the news. Peter running to the tomb to see for himself and returning home amazed. And then the incredibly beautiful story of two disciples on the road to Emmaus and the stranger revealing himself as Jesus in the breaking of bread. It is this encounter on the road to Emmaus that the disciples are talking about when Jesus suddenly arrives in their midst, revealing himself, his body, his full self, as if he was already and always there, asking "Why are you frightened?," before sharing a meal with them and, afterwards, ascending into heaven.² All of this in just a few well-written, suspenseful verses (Luke 24).

And there is every possible human emotion: fear, terror, amazement, joy, disbelief. I imagine myself there, among them, sharing all these emotions and deeply perplexed. I know I would be beside myself with fright at the sight and sound and presence of the risen Jesus suddenly appearing and saying, "Peace be with you."

This is a moment when thinking comes to a stop.

Isn't that what awe and wonder are about? When the mind just stops. And something else, deeper and more intelligent, rises up; a different way of knowing and being and feeling. As Thomas Long puts it, "... we are not there to explain anything. We are there to proclaim with the women breathlessly returning from the cemetery, "The tomb is empty! He is not there. He is risen and alive! Jesus is loose in the world!"³

And so, despite the primacy of the intellect in our thinking, we don't have to figure it out. Indeed, Jesus opens the minds of the disciples to understand the scripture only *after* revealing and confirming the fullness of his body. "Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see..." (Luke 24:38-39)

Before the mind, the body, body language, and body wisdom.

What would it be like to live in a world in which we were present first to our collective inner wisdom; this way of knowing that is embodied, innate, resonant? If we could begin every encounter with the heart? If we let our reasoning, questioning, searching, and doing settle into the wellspring of heart, and from the heart, into the body?

Are we moving around our lives and our world, thinking, talking and doing without being conscious of who we really are and who we are becoming, together?⁴

As written in the first letter of John: "... we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed." (1 John 3:2)

And so in the Gospel story, the human body and all the senses expand into a greater dimension. The appearance of the risen Christ among his followers is about seeing, sensing, tasting, hearing in new ways, through Christ. It is about the body, the body of Christ, being resurrected. It is a whole new humanity and way of being.

And it is about our witness to this totality of new life.

And when our minds open, along with the fullness of the human body, we see suffering in new ways.

“Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24:45-48)

We bear witness to the ways our minds and bodies participate unconsciously in a world of injustice. The pandemic is exposing deep injustices which have been concealed. So many people are hurting from systems that tear the body, the body of Christ, apart.⁵ We are caught up in systems that deny the fullness of our humanity.

Our senses are overwhelmed by a world in which we grieve the death a 13-year-old boy, Adam Toledo, shot by law enforcement; in a world in which Daunte Wright was killed just a few miles from the trial of Derek Chauvin in the death of George Floyd, within a community torn apart by racial trauma; in a world in which another horrific mass shooting has taken place this time at a Fedex facility in Indianapolis.

To be witnesses to these things is too much to bear.

We can feel the full force of Peter’s words in the Book of Acts when he proclaims, pointing at us, that we have killed the Author of Life.

And yet, this Author of Life, this risen Christ, is here giving us new life, yearning for that fullness of life and the healing of the body.

In the Gospel story, Jesus asks for some food and then eats a piece of fish. The fact that the resurrected Jesus is eating doesn’t only mean that he is a material and full human body after rising from the dead. It might just mean he was actually hungry.

This divine, human, resurrected and living Jesus was *hungry*.

And Jesus is hungry because he is reaching for more life, hungering for new life, for the fullness of life, for life abundant for all.

Isn’t that what the resurrection of Christ is about? reaching, hungering, aching for more, for healing, for wholeness.

Earlier in the Gospel of Luke, before his death and resurrection, Jesus proclaims “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! (Luke 12:49)

In this human and divine anticipation, this embodied fire within, Jesus is hungry for life, the fullness of life, for all; for his body, the body of Christ, to be realized.

In Easter we learn that the body is holy. Our bodies are holy. “Touch me,” he says, “and see.”

As Martin Copenhaver writes, “Easter is not a return to life as we knew it; it is an invitation to a life beyond anything we have yet experienced....God has so much more in store for us.”⁶

And so we stand before the risen Jesus in awe, terror and amazement, called to see him through the threshold of his death. And we are called to see our own lives through the threshold of our own death, through the tender, lived realities of our bodies.⁷ May our minds be overwhelmed, may our body wisdom rise up through Jesus the Christ to cry out and bear witness to the risen One.

Amen.



Jesus appears at Emmaus⁸

READINGS

Acts 3:12-19

Peter addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

"And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out."

1 John 3:1-7

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

Luke 24:36-48

Jesus himself stood among the disciples and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost 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. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he 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 of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

¹ Eugène Burnand, 1850-1921. "Disciples John and Peter on their way to the tomb on Easter morning," from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=55038> [retrieved April 18, 2021]. Original source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BurnandJeanPierre.jpg>.

² "The opening scene is one of a noisy gathering of folks trying to put together their experiences, their memories of Jesus, and their hopes and fears. Cleopas and his companion have rushed back to Jerusalem from their own aborted journey back home. Filled with excitement at Jesus' time with them, they arrive in Jerusalem to find out that Jesus has also appeared to Peter. The eleven and those with them (v. 33) are talking about all this when Jesus is suddenly standing in their midst. It is here that our story opens." Sarah S. Henrich, writing in *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide* (Kindle Locations 14168-14172). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

³ "... we are not there to explain anything. We are there to proclaim with the women breathlessly returning from the cemetery, "The tomb is empty! He is not there. He is risen and alive! Jesus is loose in the world!" The Easter sermon does not move from doctrine to life, but the other way - from the announcement of the risen Christ at work in life to "Aha! So that's what this is about. That is what our risen Lord is doing among us this day!" Thomas G. Long, "Tread Marks and Roses: Glimpses of Resurrection" *Journal for Preachers*, vol. XLIV, no. 3, Easter 2021; p. 3.

⁴ "The earth is not really two worlds, one physical and one non-physical. It is one whole, living system. Yet the separation between these two domains in our own consciousnesses and human activities makes the expression of this wholeness and its potentials difficult. We act as partial people imposing our partiality upon the world, which cannot help but create fragmentation and disharmony. It's as if we try to play a glorious Beethoven piano sonata with one hand tied behind our back. The result leaves much to be desired." Spangler, David. *Subtle Worlds: An Explorer's Field Notes*. Lorian Press. Kindle Edition, Location 118.

⁵ "...we have systems in place that we have created and maintained that hurt so many. Help us to hear how we can heal this broken world and the parts we have contributed to its brokenness." Prayer by Lisa Cressman, The Backstory Preaching Collective+, Lecture The Rev'd Nikki Young 11/12/2020, Preaching into Corporate Trauma, <https://backstory-preaching.mn.co/posts/the-collective-nikki-young-preaching-into-corporate-trauma-11122020>

⁶ Martin B. Copenhaver, "Preaching on Easter in a Good Friday Season," *Journal for Preachers*, vol. XLIV, no. 3, Easter 2021; p. 13.

⁷ "If death was to be truly defeated, it was only by dying himself that Jesus believed he could defeat it. If he was to reach the hearts of men, it was only by suffering his own heart to be broken on their behalf that he believed he could reach them. To heal the sick and restore sight to the blind; to preach good news to the poor and liberty to the captives; to wear himself out with his

endless teaching and traveling the whole length and breadth of the land—it had not worked because it was not enough. There had to be more. "He set his face to go to Jerusalem," the Gospel says, and it was a journey from which he seems to have known that he would both never return and return always even unto the end of time and beyond.": "Only by Dying" from *The Faces of Jesus*. Frederick Buechner, Quote of the Day, 4-12-21, <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2021/4/12/only-by-dying>

⁸ JESUS MAFA. Jesus appears at Emmaus, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48275> [retrieved April 18, 2021]. Original source: <http://www.librairie-emmanuel.fr> (contact page: <https://www.librairie-emmanuel.fr/contact>). Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial ShareAlike 3.0 License.