

JESUS RISEN AND IN HIS BODY CHANGES EVERYTHING!  
3rd Sunday of Easter — April 14, 2024  
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I noticed that something rare happens in the lectionary right now. For three consecutive Sundays, beginning with Easter Day, we hear Resurrection Day stories, each from a different Gospel. This appears to be the only time in the three year lectionary cycle that we hear from three different gospels consecutively. And it got me wondering about the similarities and differences between the accounts.

Today's gospel story, from the Gospel According to Luke shares several things in common with last week's reading from John. In both accounts Jesus appears in his real body - including marks of crucifixion. And in both accounts he invites the disciples, Thomas in particular last week, to touch his body, demonstrating that Jesus risen is real and not a ghost or some kind of spirit.

One of the things I try to do when preparing a sermon is to sit with the texts with an open mind, and just listen. I read through Luke's account more than a couple of times. I realized that one sentence in particular had grabbed my attention. It is Luke 24, Verse 41:

**While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering**, he said to them "do you have anything here to eat?"

The key phrase seemed awkward to me, but also felt really important. I found myself fixated on the saying. Was it something in the original Greek that was difficult to translate into English? I checked several other translations. Two examples:

This translation, from the **Jerusalem Bible** is really interesting. Listen carefully to the first phrase:

**Their joy was so great that they still could not believe it**, and they stood there dumbfounded; so he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

From **Sarah Ruden's** new translation just recently published. Listen for a hint at a causal relationship between sheer joy and disbelief:

**But when sheer joy and astonishment still kept them from believing**, he said to them, "Do you have anything here that's fit to eat?"

And then I realized what I was reacting to, and why it had struck me so strongly. That statement expresses **ambivalence!**. It felt important because I **know** that feeling in myself. So then, I wondered., how I could possibly make sense of the disciples' experience.

\* think that the gospel writer was struggling to express strongly enough that this encounter with the risen Jesus was ABSOLUTELY stupefying!

Try to place yourself, in your imagination, at the scene:

This was Sunday. Just days before, their leader was arrested, while they all fled for their own lives. He was crucified! He was DEAD! The disciples were empty, bereft, guilt-stricken and at a complete loss, but this one thing they knew: Jesus had been killed.

In our lives there are certain things that we just know. These are the bedrock givens of our existence and our consciousness. One of them — perhaps the principle “given” is the reality, the meaning, and yes, the finality of death.

Everybody here has lost somebody. I have lost first my grandparents, then my parents, then 12 years ago, my brother, then six years ago my best friend. We also, all of us, deep in the core of our consciousness, know that one day we too will breathe our last. We all, in one manner or another, to one degree or another, have come to terms with the reality of death.

We Christians live in hope of the promises of our faith; that death is not final, that at the end of time there will be the great reunion, that the most painful outrage of life, its inevitable incompleteness, will be fully healed. But in the here and now, that remains faith and hope, in the face of the experiential finality of the deaths of those we love.

What did I say earlier? For the disciples on that momentous Sunday after Jesus' execution on the cross, their encounters with Jesus now risen were absolutely stupefying. Seeing Jesus in his body, still marked with the wounds of crucifixion, **obliterated** their own understanding about the meaning, reality and finality of death. No wonder they were in a state of “disbelieving and wondering,” “bewilderment,” “astonishment” and “amazement.”

Luke tells us something that now actually makes sense. They experienced “sheer joy” along with “disbelief.” They had, in the *psycho-speak* of our times, **a lot to process!**

Here, **in that very human need to process something brand new and integrate it into our sense of our own being**, is the first theme that unites the Gospel readings we have heard since Easter Day.

Mark’s Gospel: The women return from the empty tomb and do not say anything to anybody **out of fear**.

John’s Gospel: The disciples, huddled together in a locked room, **in fear**, John tells us, of the Jewish leaders, encounter Jesus who shows them his hands and feet, his wounds. The next week, he invites Thomas to touch his hand and his side. “Do not doubt, but believe.” He tells Thomas.

And today we hear of the disciples’ “sheer joy” wrestling with their “disbelief.”

A lot to process, indeed.

What the Gospels tell us is that once sheer joy had been integrated with belief, the disciples’ minds were then **finally** open to understand what Jesus had been teaching all along. Gospels are replete with stories of the disciples misunderstanding Jesus. But now, in the certain knowledge of Jesus alive, his lessons could be integrated and become the foundation of a continuing community of faith.

Before now, I had never *fully* grasped the enormity of that Easter evening experience. Now I wonder about where in my life, ... in our lives ... we find a parallel to that encounter that the disciples had with the Risen Lord. I think the Luke actually provides a clue, in another resurrection encounter we do not read in this year’s cycle of readings. It comes immediately before the story we heard today, also found in Chapter 24.

It is the story of two of Jesus followers, not members of the twelve, who were walking in the late afternoon toward the village of Emmaus. As they talked about all that had happened Jesus himself approached and began to walk with them, but, Luke tells us, they couldn’t recognize him. They shared their sadness at all that had happened to Jesus, and their bewilderment at stories that the tomb where Jesus was buried was empty. Luke tells us that Jesus then began to explain from the Hebrew Scriptures all that the prophets had said about why

the Messiah must suffer so to enter into his glory. As evening fell, they then pressed him to stay at an inn. Luke says:

When he was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he vanished from sight. They said to each other, "Where not our hearts burning within us as he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" They got up and returned to Jerusalem and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how **he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.**

I love this story. And I testify to you that I know this experience because I have had, and still continue to have this experience. I know the feeling of my heart burning within me as my whole body as well as my mind responds to the Gospel, and, like these two disciples, Jesus has been known to me again and again in the breaking of the bread.

I will never have, this side of the eschaton, an encounter like the disciples did, with the living Jesus - in his body. But my life, my heart and my soul have been shaped by my encounters with the Risen Lord in the Eucharist, in the gathered community, and in the scriptures. And so I end with a prayer for me and for you that the Holy Spirit will continue to prepare us to do what Jesus commissioned his disciples to do on that Easter night, to bear witness to Jesus risen and alive, and proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Amen.