

“And”

Acts 3:12-19; 1 John 3:1-7;  
Luke 24:36-49

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This is the third time Jesus has had a resurrection interaction in Luke’s Gospel. In the first one, we actually don’t see Jesus; we see an angel saying, “He’s not here. You guys are in the wrong place.”

Later on, the disciples run out to see the tomb and when they come back, some dude just starts walking with them and starts telling them all about resurrection. They are thinking this is strange, but this is cool. Then they invite him over for dinner, and he breaks bread, reenacting the Last Supper, and—surprise—it’s Jesus.

In some of the other gospels, we see at the tomb Mary searching around for Jesus. She talks to the gardener. “Where is he? Find him!” When the gardener says her name, he is revealed to be Jesus.

I think it’s important to remember these previous interactions, because at this point in Jesus’ resurrection it has been a little like a spiritual hide-and-go-seek game. People are looking for Jesus, they can’t find him, then he just appears. Even in this passage, it says he appears in their presence. So you would be able to forgive the disciples for thinking maybe Jesus is a ghost. Our understanding of ghosts and spiritual things is that we can’t see them, we can’t touch them, they disappear, then they’re gone, and they are different and other than us.

So I think Jesus, in this time appearing to his disciples, in this interaction, wants them to understand the nature of his resurrection just a little bit more. He wants to take it out of the wispy and the intangible into a physical sense. What does resurrection mean in our bodies and our lives and our presence?

There are three things in this Gospel passage that I want to try to hit on in a relatively short period of time. The first thing I want to hit on is that Jesus ate a fish. I find this to be very important, very significant, and utterly odd. The second thing I want us to hit on is this idea of Jesus opening their minds. The third thing I want to hit on, maybe a little more briefly than the first two, is what this means about the Holy Spirit and the instruction to wait upon the Holy Spirit that Jesus ends with.

So first, let’s deal with the fish. Confession time: When Norman asked me to preach this morning and I got out the lectionary to see what the passage was, I thought for a second I was going to do the Walk to Emmaus. I read the verses wrong, and I thought Walk to Emmaus—Jesus appearing by their side, breaking the bread, the symbolism of the Last Supper—I can preach on that. Then I got to this passage and I was like, “Wow! That’s a lot of drama and gravitas about eating a carp. I’m not sure I totally understand what’s happening here.” I venture to say I still don’t totally understand what’s

happening here. But, I have spent some time with this fish imagery and why it is so important to Luke, and why we need to know this.

I think what we need to understand from this, what's really important here, is that Jesus is *alive* alive. Jesus eats a fish because he wants his friends, his disciples, to understand, "I am not just spiritually alive. I am not alive in your hearts. I'm not alive like those pictures in the Harry Potter movies about the dead people who can talk to you but just recap previous experiences. I'm alive. I'm eat-a-fish alive. I'm shake-your-hand alive. I'm give-you-a-hug alive. If I worked really hard, I'm probably sweat alive. This is my body. This is the body you know. Look, here are the holes in it." I would venture to say that if Jesus got a scar from hitting his head on a table, that's still there, too. This is Jesus. This is his body, and it's physical. It's there and you can touch it and it can eat a fish and it is significantly present to you.

This might not seem like a very controversial idea. This idea that Jesus is alive—maybe we've grown more accustomed to that. It's become more normal to us. Maybe it's become more normal to us that someone rises from the dead than that ghosts exist, for example. But for the readers of the time, this is a really controversial idea. That resurrection is possible is crazy. But even more than that, the first heresy, the first theological struggle of the early church was with a concept that predated Christianity, called Gnosticism. I would advise you to read some gnostic literature, but you really don't want to. It's as unintelligible as later-day Beatles albums. There's nothing about it that makes a ton of sense, but the basic idea I was able to derive from it was this: In a gnostic world view, the spiritual realm is good. It is perfect. It is the way things ought to be. It's kind of like Plato. There's a theory of forms and those forms are the perfect ideal. The physical realm is where all the bad stuff is, the gross stuff, the nasty stuff—all that exists in the physical realm. The thing that is most important with our lives is to transcend the physical, to move on from the physical and exist in spiritual perfection. So a lot of gnostic Christians didn't even believe the incarnation actually happened. They thought that Jesus was always spiritual and there was some sleight of hand, spiritual mojo jujitsu to make him look like he was alive, to make him look like he was physically present because how could God be as grimy and dirty and physical as we are?

In response to that idea, in response to that concept, Jesus says, "Give me that fish. I'm going to eat it. I need you to understand that I care about your bodies. I need you to understand that I have a body. I need you to understand that the physical is important and it's real. Your bodies are physical, and they matter, and they are real." We have to understand this because it informs every way we think about faith. Do bodies matter? Does health matter? Does food matter? Does equality matter? Does it matter if some bodies are treated differently? Does it matter if some bodies are policed differently? Does it matter if some bodies are driven from their home? Does it matter if we take bodies in? Does it matter if we care about the needs of bodies? And to that, Jesus says, "Give me a fish. It matters. Your body matters. Resurrection of my body and later of your body matters." In the gnostic view, it doesn't.

First Corinthians is all about these weird habits of the Corinthian church, partly because they had become so gnostic that bodies didn't matter at all. You could do with your body whatever you wanted, you could put whatever you wanted into it, because it's just a body. Who cares? Jesus says, "No, your body matters and other bodies matter, too." He eats a fish.

There's a second thing that struck me about this passage. If we just focused on the first thing, we could do a sermon on "Let's get out there and take care of some bodies. Let's increase our efforts to feed the community. Let's step into some more justice stuff. Let's think about how our bodies are temples and how we should treat them better." That would be a good sermon. I applaud the work we do in these areas, but Jesus doesn't end with bodies. He goes on to tell his disciples about resurrection. He opens their minds to scripture.

Some commentators think this is just Jesus teaching a little differently than he did before, as if one of the miracles of resurrection was that Jesus became a better orator. You can become a better teacher by resurrecting from the dead. I don't know if I buy that. I think Jesus is doing a spiritual transformation in his disciples' minds. There is so much tension in the Gospels. Jesus is like, "I'm going to Jerusalem to die." And they're like, "That's a weird analogy." They just don't get it. Jesus is like, "No, now you have to get it. Now you have to understand it because you have to be a witness to it, so I'm going to open your minds." Some spiritual transformation happens. Things that were confusing to them, things they couldn't grasp, things that left them cold, things that they couldn't get—spiritually the light turned on. There was a deep spiritual "ah-ha!" in their souls to be able to understand resurrection and how Jesus weaves through scripture.

Have you ever had one of those moments in scripture? Maybe you've read a passage a million times, maybe heard a thousand sermons on the passage you've read a million times, and it has existed in one place with one idea. Maybe you're even bored with that idea, bored with that concept. Then something changes. Your mind opens and it floods with something new, something beautiful, something of God. Jesus gives that gift to his disciples because Jesus cares about their souls. He wants them to see what he is about. He wants them to understand this repentance and forgiveness business, this death and resurrection business. He wants to change them from the inside out. Their bodies matter, but, oh, my goodness, so do their souls.

It's that "*and*" I want to talk about for a minute before we get to the Holy Spirit. Bodies *and* souls. Physical *and* spiritual. You can touch, feel the tactile world, tactile needs, *and* the deeply spiritual need we all have to know a God who loves us. That "*and*" is where I think the resurrection gets real. The "*and*" between the spiritual and the physical. The "*and*" between bodies and souls. I think that's where we live. That's where God is real. That's where church is. That's where community is. That's where real transformation is. It is us laying our bodies before God. It is us caring deeply about bodies, *and* it is us laying our souls before God and letting God restore our souls.

And far too often we choose to be either/or instead of *and* people. I'm the guy who makes sure everyone has enough to eat. I don't want to deal with that other stuff. That stuff weirds me out. I'm going to be here and do the physical thing. Or, I'm a prayer person. I'm not a people person, I'm a prayer person. I'm going to do that thing.

I remember once when I was in Coeur d'Alene, I saw a church that was going around hanging out with homeless people. The homeless were asking for money and the church people gave them biblical tracts that looked like money. Someone asked for money and they got a piece of paper explaining the Gospel that looked like a \$100 bill. I think as a church, we may have those Bible tracts, but we're sliding them inside a real \$20, right? We are meeting physical *and* spiritual, being the "*and*" people. There's something that rings hollow when a church becomes an either/or place. There's something that rings hollow when we choose one side of this "*and*" equation, but there's something that rings of heaven when "*and*" comes into the picture.

That's why I love the early parts of Acts, the early church, because I see the Holy Spirit as the great bringer of "*and*." The Holy Spirit comes and weaves this body-physical-people's needs world and this heaven-is-meeting-earth-and-changing-people-from-the-inside-out world. The Spirit brings those together and makes them one. People's bodies are being changed and healed for the better. People are selling their stuff to make sure everyone has enough. It's crazy how committed they are to spiritual *and* physical transformation. Now, they're not perfect. There is some racism in the first 8 chapters of Acts, let's be real. There's some injustice in the first 8 chapters of Acts, let's be real. But they are trying, and the Holy Spirit is changing them bit by bit, day by day. They are meeting needs better than any social worker *and* they are praying in power at the same time. There is an "*and*" in that community that haunts us and seduces us to this day. We want to see it happen. We want to see it be real—the great "*and*" of God's work.

I want to tell a story of an "*and*" person because I don't like theoretical stuff very much. So I'm going to tell you about my friend Shawna. She's an "*and*" person. When you know an "*and*" person, they stick out to you.

Shawna was a campus ministry staff worker at Washington State for many, many years. She was committed to people's bodies. She noticed some bodies were missing, not just from Intervarsity, but from every campus ministry. Namely, those bodies were the African-American students on campus. They weren't in any of the Christian groups. One or two here or there, but nothing close to the percentages on the campus were being represented. So Shawna did a very physical thing. She took her Japanese-American body and moved it into the black student center almost every day for a number of years. At first, the reality of her body being in its mid-thirties and not matching that place meant that no one talked to her for a very long period of time. But Shawna showed up every day. She showed up. She loved people. She listened, and eventually that presence became a Bible study. That presence became advocacy for more justice on campus. That presence became her being changed and learning. That presence built a bridge for there to be bodies together.

Another thing that Shawna has done after she left staff is to move to Seattle, and now she works with the elderly and the disabled who are in poverty, people whose bodies get missed, who are invisible to a society that values contribution. She makes sure they have what they need. She makes sure they have access to the programs that are available to them. She cares for their bodies.

But if you met Shawna you would never think that all she cared about was people's physical lives. The woman prays and she radiates God. I don't think she can have a conversation without talking about Jesus. I don't think she's even capable of doing it, but it's never weird when Shawna does it. It makes sense because she's been changed somehow.

I remember distinctly as a sophomore, she asked if she could pray for me. I hated being prayed for as a sophomore in college. I was a body guy, not a spirit guy. I accepted Jesus intellectually and we were good. But she asked if she could pray for me. So she laid her hands on me, physically, and prayed for me. She saw an image when she prayed for me. She saw a big, mighty person in a suit of armor and I thought to myself, "Maybe I should let her pray for me more often." I liked being mighty. Then the armor peeled away and there was a scared little boy cowering in the boot of one side of that armor. And God opened my mind to understand what was real about me and about him that day, about my posturing, about my trying to look tough, about trying to look like I had it all together. There was a crack in my foundation that God could get into, and change and transform me, because God cares about bodies and he cares about our souls, and he cares about redemption and resurrection and repentance and forgiveness. When you're with an "*and*" person, you see how all those things come together.

When you're in an "*and*" community, you see how those things come together. So this morning I want to applaud some of our "*andness*." I love the way we are a congregation of Stephen Ministry *and* a congregation of Family Promise. I love that we're a congregation that loves a diverse group of people and we're active in many corners. I love that we come together in worship and prayer and we give honor and space to praising God and to having our souls transformed. And I also pray for us, that God would reveal where we lack "*andness*," that the Holy Spirit would break through more and more in our congregation and in our lives to weave together the physical and the spiritual and to make us people that resemble the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.