

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.”

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Why did Jesus eat fish? That may seem a trivial question. And yet, Luke is a meticulous story-teller. So there must be a reason.

Cleopas and Mary have been in Emmaus where the Risen Christ was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. In that encounter, Jesus corrected some misinterpretations of the meaning of the crucifixion.

Now back in Jerusalem, Cleopas and Mary meet the eleven disciples and their companions who have just told them that the Risen Christ appeared to Simon. And while they are still comparing notes, Christ is suddenly standing among them.

They are startled and terrified. And so, before he can do anything else, Jesus has to calm his friends down. He invites them to look at him and touch him.

And then he eats a piece of broiled fish.

Now, if Luke had wanted to tell us about a reanimated carcass or a man who had recovered from a near-death experience, the author might have told us that the people were thrilled at the sight of their friend. Surprised, maybe, at first, but then celebrating with enthusiasm and relief.

That's not what Luke describes. The disciples know that Risen Jesus isn't just a resuscitated corpse, still less someone who had *almost* died but somehow managed to crawl to safety. The Romans knew how to kill a person.

Jesus establishes that he has a physical body. "Touch me," he says. "A ghost doesn't have flesh and bones." With that gesture, he counteracts some misinterpretations of the resurrection. *Some*, that is, but not all and not for all time.

Questions about what kind of body the resurrected Jesus had still haunt our thinking. The most dangerous threat to Christian theology for the first three centuries after the resurrection was the premise that Jesus only *seemed* human and was always a being of celestial substance – a form of god or an angel in human disguise.

In the year 325, at the Council of Nicaea, the church declared this line of thought a heresy – called Docetism, if you want the name so you can win trivia night. More than a hundred years later, the Council of Chalcedon tried to resolve the issue again and gave us language about the "two natures" of the "one person," Jesus the Anointed.

And yet, variations of the notion that Jesus was just a fortunate human or that he was a Divine being who only looked human continue to show up to this day. Because making logical, rational sense of the premise that a human can die and then rise physically, *bodily*, from the dead is not easy. It wasn't then and it isn't now. That's just not what happens in our experience.

In fact, if you have *never* wrestled with questions about the Easter story, you may not be paying attention. If you have, then you and I are in good company because the disciples who knew him best couldn't make rational sense of it, even when he was standing right there in front of them.

Meeting the Risen Christ persuaded the disciples that he was not just some guy who had somehow managed to stagger away from torture, crucifixion and three days in a sealed cave. Despite their initial shock, they also knew that the Risen Christ was more than the ghost of

a dead man and something other than a purely celestial being only wearing a human skin.

They knew about ghosts and visions, hallucinations and altered states, but this experience was nothing like that. What our church grandmothers and grandfathers tried to describe is an experience that bursts the boundaries of rational, logical thought.

What they met was an entirely new creation.

And so, they stammered along to the best of their ability, as if they knew how crazy they sounded – in disbelief from joy and in amazement – trying to tell us about a body that is was as rightfully at home on earth as it is in God’s heaven.

Up to that point, gods were gods and humans were humans. At the time, Greek thought provided the most influential scholarly explanations for the world’s workings. And a compelling explanation shows up in Homer’s *Odyssey* in the example of the goddess Athena who prefers to disguise herself as a human whenever she visits earth.

But the Jesus event was a category buster.

Attempts to squeeze Christ into the Greek-like category of “Divine in disguise” are especially problematic. These tend not to explain, but to explain *away* the real human life that Jesus lived and the suffering of the crucifixion. If Christ is like a Greek god, then God remains removed and separate from the experience of human suffering.

What our grandmothers and grandfathers in the faith labored to show us was their *experience* of the birth of new creation that began with the rising of the crucified Jesus; a new creation intended for the whole world. Jesus the Anointed came to us as a physical human, suffered pain as we do, and died as we all will. He was raised bodily, as we all will be.

You might think that all Jesus needed to do was to let his followers touch this strange new body; to see this new creation that was beyond evidence of “life after death.” Here was the first tangible experience of life *after* life-after-death; the resurrection life promised to all God’s children.

What may be even more stunning is that a tangible exposure to the promise of resurrection life is only *part* of what Jesus wanted his followers to experience. The rest of what Jesus wanted for all his followers is the reason that the Risen Christ ate a piece of broiled fish with his friends.

Jesus ate fish to re-establish table fellowship with the people he loved.

Cleopas and Mary encountered the Risen Christ in the breaking of the bread at Emmaus, and then went to Jerusalem where they were reunited with their friends. There, Jesus appeared among them and bid them “Peace – shalom,” the greeting and blessing offered to promote the binding and healing of relationships and the well-being of all people.

With that gesture, the Risen Christ offered the restoration of whole and holy relationships between God and people, between people themselves; between himself and his friends.

He invited them to touch his Risen Body. And then he did something else; something beyond evidence for his physical presence.

He asked the disciples for something to eat.

Imagine. The Risen Christ asking to come to your table.

Across the ancient world, eating together was an expression of intimacy that expressed mutual honor and acceptance. And for first century Jews, sharing food implied sharing God’s life. During his earthly life, Jesus gathered prostitutes, tax collectors and notorious sinners to his table, where he offered the most intimate association with the most unlikely people.

By sharing his table with these folks, Jesus visibly demonstrated his acceptance of them and he did so *before* they repented. By dining with these unlikely groups of people, he invited them into his community, the realm of God, the renewed Israel.

And so, the simple feast of broiled fish that Jesus ate with his friends was a celebration of their mutual solidarity. In the resurrection, God overcame the barrier of death to reunite the Risen Christ and the

children of God. And each one of God's children who is returned to the flow of God's life is a gift of God given to God.

The presence of the Risen Christ comes into concentrated focus in the simple meal of bread and wine that we share at this table. And yet, the inexhaustible mystery of communion eludes – *defies* – our ability to fully explain it. Our efforts to rationalize encounters of the Risen Christ may even drain the liturgy of its intended *experienced* impact.

The promise of resurrection, of new life in the light of God's grace, is so incredible and so desperately desired that it has always provoked questions. Even so, just a *taste* of the fulfillment of that promise has also always changed lives.

In the mystery of the bread that we break with the Risen Christ at every Eucharist, we invite him into our community as we are welcomed into the realm of God. The Risen Christ is both host and guest. Christ is that which we take into ourselves and that into which we empty ourselves. Together with Christ, we are gathered, blessed, broken and given to each other and to creation

In our renewed solidarity with Christ, our lives become vessels for God to fill until we pour out the love that restores the whole Kosmos to communion. We are witnesses of these things until the day that God's communion is accomplished perfectly in the life of every living thing.

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