



3rd Sunday of Easter

Sermon by Revd Matthew Wright



14 April 2024

READINGS

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

The Resurrection

Greetings Friends.

Today is the third Sunday of Easter and so we are still basking in the glory of the Resurrection. Or are we? Since only two weeks have lapsed since the day of the Resurrection, perhaps like the disciples in our Gospel reading, we too are still coming to terms with its reality.

While in the Acts reading for this Sunday, Peter gives an emboldened speech in defence of Jesus and the Resurrection, in our Gospel reading, the disciples are still largely in a state of shock, disbelief, fear and disorientation. And we heard an excellent sermon last week from Revd Sharmain about states of disorientation and reorientation. Today's Gospel reading is not entirely dissimilar from the Resurrection account we heard in John last Sunday. The key difference is that the Holy Spirit is issued in John's account, for a quite particular purpose it would seem. Luke however is eager to highlight the physicality of the resurrection.

In our approach to the Gospels, I often feel it helps to remember that the Gospels were written in a post-Easter light. In other words, they are written in light of the resurrection and against the backdrop of the resurrection and the events of Easter Sunday and with the benefit of hindsight. So in the case of today's Gospel reading, Luke 24:36-48, the writer of Luke is providing a proof text of the physical resurrection in the context of the early Church and in the context of various debates and controversies which were raging about the authenticity of Jesus' resurrection and whether or not it was a physical or spiritual resurrection.

At an immediate and practical level, Jesus' wounds demonstrate firstly his identity, that it was him and not an imposter that was raised and stood before the disciples and, secondly, that he was raised in a physical body. This latter point is further driven home by the detail of Jesus eating fish. Such accounts may have been to dispute what were later termed heresies, such as Docetism (from the Greek *dokeio*, "to seem") which stated Jesus only seemed or appeared to have a physical body and was really a spirit or a phantom. So this to a large extent is the purpose such accounts served from a confessional and apologetic perspective in the life of the early Church. What do such accounts mean or say to us today?

Without wishing to be too prescriptive because such accounts may speak to us in multiple ways, this particular account affirms and sacralises our corporeality or our bodiliness. The Judeo-Christian tradition does not have a very good track record when it comes to positive body affirmation. On the contrary, both Judaism and Christianity seem to have developed phobias of the body. We are ashamed of the human

body, our human bodies, we are afraid of them, and they are taboo. In ancient Judaism, bodily fluid of any kind was contagion. If anything inside the body transgressed by coming outside the body, it rendered one ritually impure and unclean.

Christianity inherited this hypochondria, and though it was focused primarily around issues of sex and sexuality, the fundamental phobia of the body remained. It is also worth noting that this tendency within the Judea-Christian tradition, was contributed to and reinforced by a fundamental dualism which may go as far back as Greek philosophers like Plato.

Such dualisms may have also undergirded some of the heresies we mentioned earlier. The dualism has taken various forms since its inception but translates ultimately into a separation or dualism between the physical and the material. In the case of Plato, this was derived from his theory of Forms, which are quasi-spiritual 'types' of the material realities we encounter on a day-to-day basis.

When we come to church on a Sunday, our corporeality is left behind at home, because the church is not a place for the body, it is a place for the spirit. The Church pertains to spiritual matters not physical, bodily ones. And yet, the central symbol of our faith, indeed it is the visual focal point in most Anglican churches, is the bruised, battered and bloodied body of a dying man. It's as if God was trying to say to the Church, "I know you really don't like this whole body thing, but you sooner or later, you have to come to terms with it."

The whole miracle and import of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is not in the first instance that God atoned for our sins (though this was achieved) or that we get to be saved and go to heaven (which is a very narrow way of understanding salvation), but that God's nature was fundamentally and forever wedded to human nature – therein lies our redemption. It was a human body that died, a human body that rose, and human body that was subsumed into the Godhead to complete the Trinity.

So this third Sunday of Easter, at Christ's behest, let us along with the other disciples, be eager to place our fingers in Christ's wound and our hand in his side that we might better come to terms with our own bodiliness.

Amen