

“Practicing Resurrection With Our Bodies”  
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The first reading reminds that what we will be hasn't been revealed, but we are God's children *now*. And the gospel reading? Well, we are told that we are to be “witnesses,” which is something we must do with our bodies. (1 John 3:1, 2, Luke 24:48)

In the second book we read together back in 2015, *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor reminded us that “Our bodies are prophets...and they know when things are out of whack...and they say so, but we would rather lock up our bodies than listen to what they have to say.... which leaves us in the peculiar position of being followers of the Word Made Flesh who neglect our own flesh or—worse—who treat our bodies with shame and scorn.”

Today's gospel reading from St. Luke's narrative reminds us that practicing resurrection is done with our bodies. In other words, our bodies are not incidental but are the connecting tissues that connect us to everything else, people and things. What is touched, tasted, and seen is what connects with each other. The mystifying event of the post-Easter Jesus connecting with his disciples is as much about their bodies as his. Our bodies are not incidental to the story in today's gospel reading.

Here's a second point if you are keeping track: Wearing our skin is a communal not a solitary practice; life is the constant rubbing elbows with others. Rubbing elbows? Maybe shoulders? Wiktionary says the phrase is “idiomatic, and is usually followed by “with.” To associate closely with. To socialize, consort, mingle with. And the act of practicing resurrection is usually followed by “with.” It's not meant to be rough, but it is a contact sport, or resurrection remains out of our reach. Eastertide is not the season in which we go around looking for the body of Jesus, but an unnerving reminder that discipleship is about our bodies not his. In time, Jesus' followers were so convinced of this that they started referring to themselves as the “body of Christ!” To be sure, Luke uses body language and images to tell this story, and it makes us nervous, all this body talk; it supposedly terrified the first disciples. But notice that Luke doesn't have Jesus explain how resurrection works; Jesus simply is with them again but in a new way. And it is nerve racking.

Kristin Grant, a free-lance writer from St. Paul, Minnesota, has shared that one of her favorite activities in kindergarten was playing the mystery game “What's in the box?” She and the other kids would put a hand into a hole of a box; they could smell the box, shake the box – everything but open the box. “Oh, it's...it's kind of fuzzy,” - “Is it a teddy bear?” “I think it feels like a ball, a ball...with points...Is it a football?” It was more than a game; it was a way of practicing exploring the world, asking good questions, putting clues together, holding back guesses and being patient so a good conclusion could emerge. (*Christian Century*, April 2018) Jesus, when with them in this new and strange way, unnerves them. Isn't he dead? Is this a ghost? Grant writes: “Jesus gently coaxes them to a third, unconsidered, incomprehensible conclusion. He doesn't explain resurrection, but instead encourages them to discover it for themselves:

“Look at my hands and feet.... A ghost? Are you sure?.... Is that what a ghost feels like?....Do ghosts chew and swallow? It is I. I know you don’t understand it; I know you can’t believe it. But go ahead, take a guess at what God is doing.”

Practicing resurrection is what “fools for Christ” do with their own hands, feet, voices and taste buds! It is not ours to go around explaining things, nor do we have the luxury of saying “Here is the left hand of Jesus; see – his wounded side – if you rub it here you’ll get what you need whenever you want it.” That’s not Easter, that’s Hollywood’s “I Dream of Jeannie.” To practice resurrection is to say “Here, take my hand! Now, as I follow Christ, I invite you to follow my feet. Come, taste with me the bread and the wine. Listen with me to his words: “Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

A famous archeologist was once asked how he knew that ancient biblical characters like Abraham and Sarah really existed, and supposedly he responded – “I don’t know if they existed then, but I know they exist now or we wouldn’t be having this conversation.” After two thousand years of talk of the empty tomb, we still don’t know what happened on that first Easter, how Jesus was “alive” then, but it is clear to me that he is alive now. An eight-year-old girl named Mary reminded us on Easter Morning that somehow God in Christ comes and goes, here and everywhere. Resurrection is being practiced now, today, and all over the place, and we are witnesses not all that unlike the daffodils and tulips bear witness. Go to the Skagit Valley if you have lost the feel for resurrection.

God in Christ still comes to us and bids us “Be my witnesses of resurrection. I don’t need experts, just witnesses. You’ll likely end up a martyr for your practice of such foolishness; but no one gets out of this life alive.” Be my witnesses. St. Francis of Assisi was fond of saying “Witness to the gospel at all times, but only use words when necessary.” Why? Because witnessing to the resurrection is *praxis*, a practice, usually involving something very practical. Orthopraxis not orthodoxy – I’ve almost grown too tired to argue about dogma any more. One writer put it this way: “We are witnesses when we can invite someone to look into our homes and find Jesus there, into our families, our friendships and find Jesus there, our work, our checkbook, our calendar—and find Jesus there. We are witnesses when we allow ourselves to be touched by folks who are lost and afraid. We are witnesses when we live in a way that defies any explanation other than the presence of the risen Christ within us. Look, touch, see, believe! It isn’t a ghost. It’s the living God.”

I recently read about an elderly woman who makes her living selling artificial fruit. One day a customer complained the fruit she sold was not realistic enough, too fake, in other words. “See,” pointing to an apple on the counter, the complaint continued, “See, this apple is too red, too round and too big to be a real apple!” And without missing a beat or saying a word, the artificial fruit lady picked up the apple and proceeded to eat it.

Practicing resurrection with our bodies. Those who have gone before us commend this practice to us. Of course, some maintain that resurrection is just too good to be true, too red and round and big, too artificial to be real. An interesting complaint. Of course, that’s when it is best to stand in a field of tulips. And if you can’t, well, find somebody to simply be with, and share with them a really good apple. Amen.