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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
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1 John 3:1-7, Luke 24:36-53

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We have before us this morning one of the most interesting and fun combinations of Easter texts I can imagine. Listen as I read again two verses from our readings -- one from our Epistle Lesson and one from our Gospel Lesson. Maybe you will see right off the bat the direction I want to go in this sermon.

Here is the verse from First John Chapter Three:

²Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears *we shall be like him*, for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:1, RSV)

And here is the passage I especially like from our Gospel Reading:

⁴¹While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate in their presence. (Luke 24:41-43, NRSV)

From these two passages I conclude that Russell Collins is going to be happy in heaven, for there shall be room in that good place for his barbecuing. Same with Maggie Luthar: There shall be room for her barbecuing. And room for Lara Simone Bhasin's baking! For we shall be *like him*, and he got hungry and ate some good old-fashioned food.

It's the same thing in the great reconciliation scene at the end of St. John's Gospel: again, we read of food. It makes me happy just to think of it. The story goes like this. With his threefold denial of our Lord behind him and still needing to be dealt with, Peter and some of the other disciples go fishing:

Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. (John 21:3, KJV)

And so it is that these men who had been called to be fishers of men return to being fishers of fish.

They catch nothing that night. But in the morning they find Jesus on the shore, bidding them to come to land. And when they do, they find that Jesus has prepared breakfast for these working men:

⁹As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread... ¹²Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine... (John 21:9-12, KJV)

And that will be great! I shall be so happy to dine with Jesus in heaven. It will be great to have him host a fire of coals with fish laid thereon.

I love these stories about the resurrected Jesus and suppertime because they are so human. Here, we have not a story of ghosts and spirits, but of living people, bodies and souls and minds.

That great, southern, American writer of short stories Flannery O'Connor once broke out in frustration when talking about the notion that the Blessed Sacrament is just a metaphor for the salvation of Christ: Forgive me for using her strong language, but I think its strength is its virtue: So, about the Blessed Sacrament, she said this: "If it's just a metaphor, then to hell with it."

That's how I feel about notions of heaven with disembodied spirits: If heaven consists of a bunch of spirits floating around that can't even eat a good barbecue, then to hell with it!

Same with memories of our loved ones: I'm sick to death of memories of my mother and father. I don't want memories, I want *them!* Take me to a funeral and tell me that my loved one lives in "the memories" of those who loved that one, and I want to throw up my hands in frustration and can hardly keep from walking out.

Our faith is not a skinny faith. We do not look forward to having such insubstantial bodies that we do not even need to eat. No, our Gospel hope is not for release from the body, but for its satisfaction. It is as young Mary sang in her Magnificat:

⁵²He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. ⁵³He hath *filled the hungry* with good things; (Luke 1:52-53, KJV)

Among the many fine images of heaven in the Bible, I think this is one of the most joyful: heaven is a glorious banquet where all are welcomed and all are fed with good things. As we say in our Eucharistic prayer:

And, believing the witness of his resurrection, we await his coming in power to share with us the *great and promised feast*.

This is what God has promised us – a feast of fat things – so says the prophet Isaiah:

⁶On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear. ⁷And he will destroy on this mountain the face of the shroud that is cast over all people, and the sheet that is spread over all nations; ⁸He will swallow up death forever... (Isaiah 25:6-8)

Do you see what I am trying to do? I am trying to take my lead from this morning's Bible story of the resurrected Jesus. I am trying to figure out something of heaven and of our destiny in Christ.

So, St. John says that we shall be like Jesus:

...it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears *we shall be like him*

And how is that? What is Jesus like, judging by our Gospel Lesson?

Well, I notice three things about the resurrected Jesus: (1) He has a body that can be handled. His body is not transparent or flimsy or misty or wispy or ghostlike. (2) He remembers things from his earthly life. And (3) He continues to desire peace for us.

A chief emphasis of this morning's Gospel is that the resurrected Jesus has a body. It is what is called a "transfigured body," but a human body nonetheless. It has greater powers than we have known so far, and they sound like fun powers. For one thing, Jesus suddenly appeared among the disciples, with no mention of him knocking on the door and it being opened to him. Indeed, in St. John's version of the story, the evangelist emphasizes that the door is shut, yet Jesus stands amidst the disciples anyway.¹ Christ's body seems to have the ability to pass on through solid objects. It seems to be like sunlight passing through a window pane. The sun's ray can pass right through a solid object, carrying its warmth and ability to illumine right along with it. But the resurrected body of Jesus is even better, for his body can be touched and handled, even hugged and kissed and knelt before, I like to think. Still, it is a human body, with the nail prints in his hands, the wound of the spear in his side, with a body that can be handled and an appetite for some broiled fish.

Now some of you might say, but Pastor, my body has betrayed me!² My body has let me down! I feel myself to be a young person, a lively, energetic, athletic person imprisoned in an old and broken down body! I look forward to the day when I am freed from this body and can soar with the eagles, or keep company with the angels!

I understand that, indeed I do! But our Epistle Reading says that we shall be "like him," and that means that we shall still have bodies, only they will be strong and wonderful bodies.

There remains a veil of mystery over all of this -- "*it does not appear* what we shall be...but we shall be like him..." -- still, the resurrected Jesus affirms that he is "flesh and bones" as before. He is not a ghost or a disembodied spirit. He becomes hungry and can enjoy food and drink as always. The greatest joys of earthly life are not taken away from him.

So it will be with us. God has made us with bodily senses with which we take delight in the wonderful things of life. The taste of a ripe peach or a juicy steak and a glass of good Cabernet; the smells of flowers blooming in the springtime, or of cookies baking in the oven; the sight of a glorious sunset or a mountain peak dipped in snow or of azaleas in full bloom; the sounds of birds singing and of a violin playing the music of gifted composers like Bach and Beethoven; the touch of velvet or of the hand of your beloved. I could go on and on -- colors, sights, sounds, smells, sensual pleasures -- are these all to be taken away from us in the kingdom of heaven? I think not! These are the

¹ Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.(John 20:19, KJV)

² This fine paragraph and the next four come from my wife Carol's sermon for today. Her congregation at The Wartburg is elderly -- not all of them, but many of her people are elderly -- and Carol remains mindful of the decline of our human bodies. Still, she preaches the faith of the Church: we believe in the resurrection of *the body*.

glories of God's magnificent creation! If anything, they will be even richer and more thoroughly enjoyed by us.

But best of all, being flesh and blood and not flimsy spirits, we can enjoy the physical presence of one another – we can hug and be hugged! The physical affection which we all need and crave will be possible for us because our bodies will be flesh and blood, and our hearts will be pure.

The second characteristic of the risen Jesus is that he remembers. The trauma of death and resurrection has not somehow erased his memory. It has not thrust him into Alzheimer's Disease. He remembers his disciples and invites them to remember too:

⁴⁴Then 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."

I am sure the disciples recalled many sweet conversations with their Master and many marvelous deeds. Now we learn that the resurrected Jesus remembers things too.

This is important, for there can be no heaven for me where I do not remember you! What a sorrow that would be! To meet you in heaven someday and not even remember you! No, the resurrected Jesus remembers.

Hastening on, let us notice a third characteristic of Jesus. He desires peace for his people. It is the first thing he says when he suddenly stands among his disciples:

And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. (Luke 24:36, KJV)

The desire for peace had been a strong theme of Jesus in his earthly life with his disciples. What had he said, for example, to the raging storm on the sea?

And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. (Mark 4:39, KJV)

What had been his invitation to every weary soul?

²⁸Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30, KJV)

What had been the first thing he wanted to say to his disciples when time was running short and his betrayal was drawing near?

²⁷Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27, KJV)

Now we find that the cruel death and the glorious resurrection of Jesus have not changed him in this regard. The first words to his lips are words of peace: "Peace be unto you."

This is the Man who is charge of your future. He is the One in charge of reality. And his first instinct is toward peace. We are meant for an eternal serenity then, except for this: We shall have those marvelous, transfigured bodies with the ability to transport ourselves instantly, even through solid objects. And surely, in such a large universe as the Triune God has created, we shall want to use those transfigured bodies for adventures of exploration. Peace with adventures: that's how I figure heaven will be.

Cherish, then, your bodily life. Do not think your body to be a burden or a strange thing to you. Enjoy your senses. Enjoy those trees and flowers along Park Avenue. Enjoy the hand of your beloved. Seek health, practice safety, plunge into getting to know one another and then remember what you have learned, as Jesus remembered his disciples. Greet each stage of life with warmth and welcome, from the strength and passion of youth to the calmness and wisdom of old age. And practice peace. As far as lies available to you, practice peace. Get yourselves ready for heaven, in both your body and in your spirit. Altogether, live for the resurrected Jesus, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.