

Sermon for the Third Sunday of Easter, April 15, 2018

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"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."

- Luke 24:46-47

The easiest thing to overlook about the resurrection is the physicality of it. The verbs used to describe our Lord's appearances after the resurrection are not at all ethereal. The disciples emphasize seeing, touching, eating, hearing, talking, walking. Again, and again the gospel writers, and the apostles in their letters emphasize the physical, material, flesh and bone nature of the resurrection of our Lord.

And it's important for us to notice this and take it to heart not least because of what it reminds us about the resurrection of the dead - that when the trumpet sounds and the dead are raised we will be like Jesus, with physical bodies of flesh and blood and bone.

Creation and the created world is not done away with, it is recreated, made new, made whole.

Yet, there's another aspect to it all that is important in this life. Just as the Word created the physical, material world, so too His incarnation and birth in the person of Jesus Christ, His life, suffering, death, and resurrection are physical - everything from amniotic fluid and dirty diapers, to hammering and sawing as a carpenter, to walking dusty roads, and eating and drinking, betrayed by an actual kiss, His flesh torn and beaten, and the nails hammered through His hands and feet, walking out of the grave, breaking the bread at Emmaus - so too is what comes after it physical, *"that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in His name to all nations."*

Our faith, the Christian faith, is meant to be physical, material, tangible. We see this both in our first reading and our Gospel which are recorded for us by Saint Luke.

In our first lesson we hear about the healing of a man lame from birth. Peter and John go to the Temple, as was their custom, at the ninth hour to pray. On their way in they see this man begging. He's been there day after day after day, and today he sees Peter and John. So he asks them if they can spare any change. Peter and John have no money, but that doesn't mean they have nothing to give.

Peter says to him, *"I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk."* And the most amazing thing happens. He does! Now remember, he's never walked before. Yet these aren't the shaky steps of a toddler, or the slow and cautious steps of someone after a hip replacement. Saint Luke says, *"immediately (that instant!) his feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the Temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God."*

This doesn't happen. Sure, everybody has heard of people who used to walk walking again. But a man born lame? Never!

What we should notice here is not simply the miracle. But why the miracle happens. See, if all that mattered was thoughts and feelings and ephemeral, spiritual stuff Jesus would not have strengthened His legs and made the man walk. But Jesus is not just here to fix the spiritual things, because the effects of sin are not just spiritual are they?

No, we've all seen enough broken bodies, broken people, broken families, broken homes, broken cities, broken nations, broken cultures to know that for redemption to matter, matter itself will need to be redeemed. We know the physicality of sin enough to know that the body, the brain, the heart, our physical selves need to be part and parcel of repentance, forgiveness, and the healing that Christ brings.

And that is what we see in this healing and others. God cares not just for our spiritual healing, He cares about the physical. He cares not just for a part of human beings, but the whole human being, body, mind, heart, and soul; flesh; bone; blood, and spirit. Because God's goal is not just to make your soul new. Not just make your spirit whole. His goal is to make you whole, it's to heal you, to forgive you, to raise you as a whole person up from your bondage to sin and death.

In our Gospel Saint Luke tells us about Jesus' appearance to the disciples and other believers on the evening of the resurrection. Cleopas and Simeon - the Lord's uncle and cousin - have just come running back from Emmaus after Jesus revealed Himself to them in the breaking of the bread. And when they arrive they find the disciples in the upper room scared and excited because the Lord has appeared to the women, to Mary Magdalene, and to Peter. And as Cleopas and Simeon tell how He walked with them on the road to Emmaus and opened the Scriptures to them, suddenly Jesus is standing in the room.

He greets them saying, "*Peace be with you,*" but they are afraid. So He shows them his hands and feet, invites them to touch Him, and to make it clear to them and us, He takes some fish and eats it. If He were a ghost, a spirit, you know what would happen. It would fall to floor. But no, He eats it, the same as you and I do. The risen Christ is still flesh and blood and bone. Yet there is something different about Him. A resurrected body is not the same as what we have now - you and I can't walk through walls, but Jesus can. But even if there is something different, it's still a human body, still flesh and blood and bone, it's still physical, material, touchable. Because from before the Beginning God was set on redeeming the whole of Creation, the whole of you.

And so that means that for you and for me the physicality of the resurrection is important. It's important because of what it promises will be on the day the Lord returns and the dead are raised. It's important because of what it promises us about the forgiveness Christ gives, for your forgiveness is dependent on Jesus being physically raised. If only His "spirit" is raised He's not raised, He's still dead. If He's dead, you are still in your sins. But He has risen, He is alive, in the flesh. So that you have in His flesh - in the mark of the nails in hands, and in His feet, and in the hole left by the spear in His side - you have the physical seal, the material promise that you, sinner, are forgiven.

And that physicality plays out in how we live the Christian faith. Christianity is a physical religion. It's not just spiritual, it's not just emotions and feelings, it's not just about the mind and right belief. Christianity is also a physical religion of the senses, for the senses; of the body for the body because the Lord has come to redeem the whole of you, the whole of Creation both spiritual and physical, immaterial and material.

The resurrection reminds us of something it's so easy to forget. The spiritual is not better than the material, God created both, God loves both. We Christians are not gnostics. We do not believe that matter is something bad, that the physical world is something to escape from. For us it is not all spiritual and ethereal, but the concrete stuff of life. God uses water, bread, wine, and the Word written in books as the means through which His grace comes to you. They are means through which faith is given, strengthened, and sustained.

And so from the days of the Apostles we have embraced the senses and the physical in worship: Vestments, candles, incense, speaking, singing, chanting, art, architecture. We use our bodies to worship: kneeling, bowing, folding hands, making the sign of the cross, eating and drinking.

And outside of worship? We give money and possessions to the poor and those in need. We nurse the sick to health. We clothe the naked. We visit the homebound, the shut-in, the prisoner.

It's in the celebration of the fathering and mothering of children, bringing them to worship, teaching them the Scriptures, the Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer. Bringing them to the sacraments so that they may hear, speak, feel, taste, touch, and see the Father's love for them in Jesus Christ.

It's living your vocation as husbands and wives, friends and neighbors. The cup of coffee in the morning, the cup of water given to the little one who is welcomed in Jesus' name. Ours is a physical faith, and enfleshed faith, an incarnate faith because God created flesh, and took on flesh in order to redeem flesh, so He died in the flesh and rose in the flesh. And this physicality is also found in repentance and forgiveness. Jesus came to lead your whole person, your whole self to repentance. So that every part of you may have forgiveness. So that every part of you may be resurrected whole and perfected - like lambs without blemish.

So what does that mean? It means that we need to see repentance and forgiveness in all their physicality. Sin is not just a spiritual matter. It's a very physical matter isn't it? You don't just use your mind or your heart to sin. You use your hands, you go there with your feet, you look with your eyes, you speak with your tongue.

And so it follows that repentance is not just a matter of the heart and the mind. It's a matter for our bodies as well.

Repentance is simply turning away from sin and back to God. So it follows that just as the Holy Spirit leads our hearts and minds from sin to Jesus, He leads our bodies from sin and to Jesus.

We tend to think of repentance and forgiveness as cause and effect, repentance is what I do to earn forgiveness. But remember the order of your salvation?

Jesus won your forgiveness on the cross before you repented. Jesus brought your forgiveness through the resurrection before you repented. The proof of your forgiveness already lies in Jesus' resurrected flesh. Forgiveness is already here. Repentance is the Holy Spirit's work as He leads you from sin to Jesus.

The hands that grasp so tightly to our wallets and possessions, are repented and opened by the Holy Spirit to give to others in need. The eyes that lead heart and flesh into lust, are repented and turned by the Holy Spirit back to the wife, back to the husband God has given. The tongue that lashes out in anger, is repented and used by the Holy Spirit to speak life and love.

And that is how Jesus who is your forgiveness, who has promised to free you from your old sinful self does what He promises there in your body, there in your flesh, and blood, and bone. The effects of your forgiveness may not always be easy to see in your flesh. But keep your eyes on His flesh, and follow as the Holy Spirit leads you from sin to Jesus? And on the Last Day you will see in your flesh the work of forgiveness as you are made whole and new by Jesus.

This is God's promise to you: He is going to redeem you. All of you. Not just your spirit, but your flesh as well. For Jesus died in the flesh, that even your flesh may have life.

Jesus won forgiveness in flesh and bone and blood, that your flesh and bone and blood may be made new. Amen.