

Sermon – Luke 24:36b-48  
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3 Easter – Year B  
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“What’s for Dinner?”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. You know, if writing one of the four canonical gospels and penning the definitive account of the early church hadn’t worked out, St. Luke always could have been a sportswriter. I don’t know what life was like for beat reporters at the Coliseum, but he would have done just fine for himself at Wrigley Field. After all, he wrote the perfect lede for a recap of yesterday’s contest between the Cubs and Atlanta: “While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering.” Joy, disbelief, and wondering; how better to capture what players and fans alike must have been feeling after the Cubs overcame an eight-run deficit in what seemed to be a wasted game on a miserable April day. Until the eighth inning unfolded, that is, during which the North Side Nine put up nine runs on three hits, with all nine men scoring with two outs. Joy, disbelief, wondering. That about sums it up. It’s how we react when the unexpected, and unexpectedly good, happens. The Roman Catholic philologist J.R.R. Tolkien, no slouch of a writer himself, coined a term for such an ending: *euclastrophe* (Greek for “good destruction”), which he describes as “the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears.” Joy, disbelief, and wondering – all so surprising, all wrapped up together. In non-surprising sports news, my Royals lost yesterday. Again.
2. Of course, St. Luke wasn’t writing about baseball. The subject of Luke’s reporting was Jesus and the community of faith that emerged from his life,

death, and resurrection – from those precise words describing precise events, and that’s the mystery of it all. We re-engage Luke’s story on this third Sunday of Easter and find ourselves on that first Easter Sunday once more, now in the evening. So far, Luke has told us, the women have gone to the tomb and found it empty. They have shared the news and Peter has gone to check for himself. But they have not seen Jesus. Two men, making the sad journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus, are met by a stranger on the road who, when they break bread together, is revealed to be the risen Christ – and who immediately disappears. These men, Cleopas and his friend, rush back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples what has happened. And while they were discussing these things, “Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’” They’re startled, terrified. Even with everything they’ve heard that day, even with everything Jesus himself said during his ministry, they are not able to believe that Jesus is alive. He must be a ghost, something dead from the land of the dead in the midst of the land of the living.

3. But that’s not the story Luke is telling, a story about the dead visiting the living. Again, this is the gospel story of life, death, and resurrection – of life triumphing over death through the work of Jesus. Jesus invites them to look at him, to touch him, to see the wounds of love that he still bears in his body. The disciples begin to feel joy, but disbelief has not left the room. So Jesus offers one more proof. He asks them what they have in the refrigerator, they give him some broiled fish, and he eats it. Which, you know, a ghost obviously would not do. Ghosts don’t have flesh and bones; ghosts don’t eat fish. But there’s more to it than that, more than a presentation of evidence. It’s experiential, an uncommon example of a common experience. For what do we do when a loved one long unseen returns – from a semester of college or a tour of duty or simply a long absence? We touch them, hold on to them, and gather around kitchen tables to feed them, exclaiming how hard it is to believe that they’re really here. This reunion, however, is the one by which death itself has been conquered, first for Jesus and finally for us. The law and the

- prophets and the psalms have been fulfilled, and they have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ by his actual death and his actual resurrection. He is the One truly living in the land where there was once only death.
4. It matters that Jesus has matter, and is not just a ghost, because God refuses to give up on the creation that was, in the beginning, declared to be very good. Jesus' resurrection is not some spiritual notion that some ethereal part of us will one day escape this creation and go somewhere else. The resurrection proclaims that God is at work reversing and undoing the destructive forces of sin and death, is unleashing repentance and forgiveness, in order to reclaim and re-create this world into a new heaven and a new earth. We don't know what that will look like, obviously, but in his resurrection Jesus shows us that God has come to save and redeem all of us, not just all of us but all of each of us, all of our being and experience, to be reconstituted in the resurrection. We are, after all, physical beings and our physicality, our earthiness, is not a weakness to be overcome. It's how we relate to one another, how God in Christ relates to us.
  5. Because my children have been trained to provide sermon illustrations on demand, while I was working on this section of this sermon at our kitchen table a few nights ago, one of our boys came downstairs. He'd been having a nightmare and was crying. And what did I do? Well, I didn't begin with a theoretical conversation about how whatever it was he was dreaming about wasn't real. I didn't give a scholarly summation on what parental love is and why that should make him feel better. No, I opened my arms and let him fall into me, stroking his hair and gently wiping away his tears. Before he needed my words, he needed me. My physical presence enfolding his own. Through the sense of touch, of physicality, was peace restored.
  6. In the resurrection, God's physical presence enfolds our own, speaking peace to our disbelief, causing wonder and creating joy where once there was none.

In his resurrection, Jesus presents himself to us over and again, even now – today – by making himself truly present in the gifts of bread and wine by which we again take hold of his body, wounded and given for us in love. Because he can really eat, because he is not a ghost, because he truly rose, he can really be present to feed us with the food of heaven in this resurrection reunion that has conquered death. It's not very believable, but that's the turn the story took all the same. On this eucatastrophic day, may your disbelief be pierced with tears of joy and wonder as Jesus shows himself to you today. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*