

April 15, Easter 3B (Luke 24:36b-48)

Our risen savior has taste buds and a digestive tract.

by [Peter W. Marty](#) in the [March 28, 2018](#) issue

Imagine trying to convince someone that you're alive. I don't mean trying to look alert to the English teacher after dozing in class. I'm thinking of the challenge of actually having to prove that you're not physically dead.

Such was the predicament a few years ago for Charles Hubbard of Austin, Texas. This Vietnam vet received a letter from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs informing him that he was dead and that his family needed to return thousands of dollars in benefits. A victim of stolen identity, Hubbard found his checking account closed by the VA. After he made an extensive case for being alive, the VA informed him that it would take eight months for him to be officially brought back to life. That's when they would restore his pension benefits.

The resurrected Christ has his own problems convincing the disciples that he is alive and well, bodily present to them. Even the sound of his post-grave voice terrifies these followers. Exactly why they believe they are seeing a ghost is unclear. I wonder if a few of them grew up in homes with scary stuff on the walls, similar to the eerie poster that hung in my childhood bedroom: "From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggedy beasties and things that go bump in the night, Good Lord, deliver us!" I'm still not sure why or where my parents came up with that framed piece, since our family didn't believe in ghosts. But it's both poetic and spooky, which may explain how the disciples feel after spending a little too much time frightening each other around a campfire.

Or perhaps the disciples can't get popular Greek philosophy out of their heads, that the soul is immortal and merely imprisoned by the body. Come to think of it, a lot of Christians I know still believe this: that the soul floats off to heaven like a helium balloon, and the body, which was just a shell all along, stays behind to rot.

But every resurrection appearance by Jesus is a bodily resurrection. Resurrection is no metaphor. Spirits and ghosts don't bleed. So Jesus takes his own blood-scarred hands and feet and puts them right in front of the disciples' faces. "It's OK to touch me," he says, a bit like a dog owner trying to convince a scared kid that this thing with four legs and sharp teeth won't bite.

Yet the disciples remain unconvinced, disbelieving that Jesus is really standing in the flesh before their eyes. So he turns to a fresh tactic: "Have you anything here to eat?" I smile whenever I read this line because it's the first thing my best friend in high school always said upon entering my house after school. He'd head straight for the fridge and open it up without asking. When he found nothing obvious to grab, that's when he'd say, "Have you anything here to eat?"

Luke informs us that the savior of the world, in one of his first utterances out of the grave, asks for food. He doesn't make a pronouncement about the coming age or the nature of what it means to die and rise. He asks if there's anything in the fridge. This may well have been honest hunger; there's no meal service in the grave, and days have passed since the Last Supper. But more than likely, Jesus is determined to try to help these disciples know that he is not a ghost.

They hand him a piece of broiled fish, and he chews and swallows it, right then and there. If the disciples are looking for God to be some wispy spiritual being, or philosophical concept, or metaphor, or ghost, what they get instead is the Lord of heaven and earth chewing on tilapia Galilaea. Their God and ours proves to be a flesh and blood God, not a disembodied spirit. This God is vulnerable to everything that is human, including the capability of being hurt and spilling tears. Not a ghoulie or ghostie at all, God is at home in the flesh, wearing everything from bones and nerve endings to taste buds and a digestive tract.

Jesus doesn't need a T-shirt with the words, "I eat, therefore I am." He simply demonstrates that he is made of flesh. He takes the piece of fish and eats it. If one can't eat, one doesn't live. Visit an elderly friend who's lying weak in a nursing home. You'll see the aides doing everything they can to encourage your friend to eat, even if it's only a spoonful of pudding for the day. Patients in the hospital recovering from surgery will not receive discharge orders from their physician until they can eat more than Jell-O cubes and prove that their digestive system is fully alive.

From the earliest story of God molding people out of dirt to the one where Jesus breaks bread one final time before his death, God revels in physicality. This should remind us, among other things, not to intellectualize the faith. For all of our fastidiousness in dissecting theological propositions, memorizing Bible verses, and sharing truth claims, we'd do well to remember how involved our bodies are in giving shape to our faith practices.

And should we ever have to prove that we're alive, it's probably smart not to count on words alone to make our case. At some point, our bodies need to be engaged. This shouldn't surprise; it's the same truth by which the church stands or falls. John Updike puts this memorably in his "Seven Stanzas at Easter":

Make no mistake: if He rose at all
it was as His body;
if the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules
reknit, the amino acids rekindle,
the Church will fall.