

Life even more bewildering than death (Luke 24:36b-48)

Jesus' death is almost impossible to accept. Then he comes back.

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Every so often I stop in my tracks when I pull my hymnal from my bookshelf. Instead of opening it somewhere in the middle, I spot the first page with my grandfather's name in neat script. I pause and imagine his hand holding a pen over that spot. I recall that my grandfather once had a body full of breath and warmth—he gave the best hugs—and in a moment that breath and warmth ceased. I was there when it happened, but after all these years I still find it impossible to fully accept that it's true.

Such a state of mind, bewildered by grief, is a good starting place for engaging the disciples' response in stories like this Sunday's Gospel reading. Peter has seen the linen cloths lying by themselves in the empty tomb, and Jesus has vanished after appearing to two of his followers on the road to Emmaus. Now, when those three are gathered with the other apostles and their companions, Jesus shows up out of nowhere.

The disciples take some convincing that Jesus' earlier talk about rising again meant in a flesh-and-blood body. They think Jesus is a ghost, a spirit separated from material existence. It's a bit odd to me that they find ghosts a more credible possibility in this scenario, but then I'm a beneficiary of a 2,000-year-old tradition about Jesus' bodily resurrection. That aside, I'm sure I would join them in wanting to touch and know whether or not a person beloved to me really had a body like mine

again after he had been lifeless.

It's bewildering and bizarre that death takes from us the physical presence of the ones we love. And we've inherited these stories where God shows death up by doing something even more bizarre and bewildering, something completely contrary to what we have known and seen to be true.

We know there's no consensus in our pews—or pulpits—about Jesus being resurrected in a body like ours. In my first year of seminary, a friend and I sat together after systematic theology class and confided in each other that we believed in bodily resurrection. "It is a risk to believe in it," she said.

I need these stories of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances because I need a God who resurrects bodies. I live with chronic illness, and I need a Redeemer who has a body like mine, with wounds both visible and hidden to the naked eye. I need a Messiah with whom even death is not a final limit for these bodies in which, through God, we live and move and have our being.

When I put myself among the first disciples, I share in their terror, fright, and doubt that a body that ceased to have breath or to be warmed by a beating heart could somehow restart those basic acts of life. Without losing a sense of disbelief and wonder, I join in their joy to know the real presence of a God with hands and feet, flesh and bones, who asks for something to eat.