

In the last few weeks I've seen three TV series where characters died and then came back as ghosts. Even if you hadn't been following the story line, the costumes and special effects let you know that something was different about these characters—some dressed all in white, one sort of translucent like a hologram. They all gave advice and encouragement when they appeared as visions in the still living characters' dreams, though all of the living characters admitted that the ghosts just helped them figure out what they already knew deep down all along. In today's gospel, Jesus goes to some lengths to make sure his disciples know that is *not* what is happening with him.

To situate us in Luke's story, Jesus rose and was missing from the tomb when the women visited it. Nobody believed them when they relayed this news, but Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself. Jesus appeared to Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus, and they ran back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples they saw him. It is while they are still telling their story that we pick up with today's reading: Jesus was suddenly standing among them, offering his hands and feet for them to see and touch, wishing them peace, opening their minds to the scriptures, and charging them to be witnesses of what they experienced with him.

Although Jesus clearly explains that he isn't a ghost, it is just as clear that *something* about his body is different. He walks miles to Emmaus alongside his followers without them realizing who he is; they only recognize him when he blesses and breaks the bread—and then he vanishes. Although he doesn't travel back to Jerusalem with them, he appears again at about the same time they get there, and it sounds as though he is suddenly in the room with them without knocking or walking through the door. All of these things might make the disciples guess that they are interacting with a ghost. But Jesus also has a body they can touch, and he eats; those are things ghosts can't do. For Jesus' contemporaries, the verdict was still out on bodily resurrection. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the body, as we say we do when we recite the creeds. The Sadducees did not believe in bodily resurrection. Jesus demonstrates to his disciples that though he was dead, he is alive, *and* he is not merely an apparition but is standing before them in flesh and bone.

Perhaps the bigger question that Luke does not answer for us is what the disciples really see when Jesus shows them his hands and his feet: Do they see healed and whole flesh with no evidence of the crucifixion? Do they see scars from the nails? Do they see unhealed wounds?

We read last week in John's gospel that Jesus invited Thomas to put his hand in his side, but Luke doesn't tell us whether Jesus shows his hands and feet to the disciples so they recognize him by the marks of the crucifixion or so they marvel that his injuries have been erased. However, we can at least assume that Jesus is no longer suffering from the wounds of the cross since the disciples respond to him in joy.

It is possible that I am prejudiced because of how often artists portray the risen Jesus with some sort of mark on his hands; but I believe Luke hints that Jesus carries with him signs of the crucifixion. Jesus illuminates the scriptures for the disciples, reminding them that the Messiah was to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. This is what they witnessed and what they are to proclaim—not just that Christ rose from the dead but also that he suffered. The resurrection *changes* everything but it doesn't *erase* Jesus' suffering and death; resurrection only happens *through* Jesus' death. Without death, there can be no resurrection.

Sometimes in this life only resurrection—and that is to say, only *death and resurrection*—will do. To be clear, resurrection is not the same as natural rhythms of highs and lows, the cycles of nature, or the circle of life. Neither the women at the empty tomb nor the disciples in the upper room saw the resurrected Jesus and said, “Oh, of course; just like the trees look dead in the winter but are really just waiting for the new leaves of spring, Jesus who was crucified is alive again.” True resurrection is not an everyday feature of the natural world. The phoenix that rises again from the ashes is a mythological bird—you won't find it in an Audubon field guide. That's why Jesus' followers are at turns startled and terrified, disbelieving and wondering at Jesus' resurrection: this was not normal; this was entirely new.

Sometimes the mess we make in our human brokenness can't be polished, patched, or painted over. Sometimes it takes not refurbishment or renovation but death and resurrection. Jesus tells the disciples they are witnesses not just to his rising on the third day but also to his suffering and death. They are to proclaim not just forgiveness of sins in his name but also repentance. We can't skip to the new life of resurrection without first claiming what needs to die. We live in a world where too many are suffering; ignoring their suffering, excusing it, or even justifying it will never make it go away. We will never rejoice at what God has redeemed if we pretend the evil doesn't exist in the first place. Yes, we look to Jesus' resurrection as our promise of bodily resurrection in the next life. But Jesus commissioned his disciples to proclaim resurrection in *this* life first. Let's not limit God's redemptive power to a heavenly future; may God bring about resurrection in and through our lives *now* as well.