

“Indeed”

The Reverend Anna Dickson

Date: April 14, 2024



When I was a first year seminary student, I found myself in the pews of the campus chapel for a service during Easter-tide. The preacher got up to greet us in a way that I don't think I had ever heard before that moment, but have heard many times since, including just a few weeks ago in this very sanctuary on Easter Sunday. He said, "He is risen!"

And to my surprise, everybody in the congregation, except maybe me, responded - and with conviction - "He is risen indeed!"

We said it over and over. Anytime the preacher said, "He is risen!" everyone else in the room - and eventually I *did* catch on - responded with "He is risen indeed!" And the service would move on.

I left that day wondering what the word "indeed" meant to us. Situated there in a seminary community, I wondered...were we simply agreeing to a theological idea, or sharing a belief we'd arrived at through study and thought? Or were we simply enacting a rote liturgy, saying what was expected of us? Or was it deeper than that? What, I wondered, did it mean for us to say - and with such conviction - that he is risen *indeed*?

In our passage for today, the disciples are being asked to consider the significance of their own testimony. It is Easter evening, and they are in the temple in Jerusalem wrestling with the news of Jesus' resurrection together...when all of a sudden, he comes and stands among them, and he presents his body. He shows them his hands - the same hands that had touched those deemed unclean, and had healed someone's sight with spit and mud...the same hands that had taken bread, and broken it, and given it to them. And he showed them his feet - the same ones that had carried him through Galilee, the very ones that Mary of Bethany had anointed with a whole bottle of perfume and dried with her hair, the ones that had carried him, ultimately, to the cross. These hands and feet, they are familiar and they are wounded, bearing the signs of that which he had endured. And he stretches them out to show them to his disciples. And, witnessing his broken, breathing body, they recognize him.

And then he asks them a question. It is a question that a majority of commentators say is included in the story because Luke wants to underscore that Jesus is really resurrected - in the body and not just the spirit. And the question is this:

"Do you have anything to eat here?" the risen Lord asks. And, to their credit, his disciples answer, "Indeed." And they share with him what they have to offer.

Only the living experience hunger, to be sure. And so the commentators' point is made in that detail about the broiled fish: the resurrection is real.

But this question...this question on the lips of the risen Lord asks us to dig a little deeper, doesn't it? It is a question that acknowledges the persistence of human need even as the good news is proclaimed. It's a "now and not yet" kind of question that invites us to consider how we might live *right now* in the face of that need

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as we place our hope in the reality of the resurrection. It is a question that asks for a response - not just in words, but in action. In our living and in our giving. The risen Jesus does not stand among us to be marveled at..but to issue a call in the form of a question:

“Do you have anything to eat here?” he asks.

The great preacher Fred Craddock tells the story of participating in a conference on hunger at Clemson University. And this is how he tells it. “A Catholic priest and I shared the platform. The evening before I gave my lecture, a young woman began the program with a devotional. I didn’t know her. She was a young woman, I would say in her mid-twenties. She had pale, blond, straight hair; she was thin; she wore no makeup, and had a soft voice.

When she got up to give the devotional, she had a yellow legal pad with her and I thought, ‘Well, we are here for the night.’ Everybody has one sermon. Her voice was low, but I am sure she was speaking another language. And she spoke in *another* language. And then in *another*, and then in yet *another* language.

I do not know how many languages.” the preacher continues. “I did not keep count. But what she was doing was saying one thing in the major languages of the world. When she got to German, I thought I knew what she said. When she got to French, I was even more confident that I knew what she said. I suppose she said this one thing sixty or seventy times in sixty or seventy languages. It was one sentence, and the last time she spoke it, she spoke it in English.

She said, “Mommy, I’m hungry.” And then she sat down.

I thought about what she said all the way home that night,” Craddock writes.

There is something poignant to me about the fact that the risen Jesus hungers. Because in his hunger he carries the hunger of all of God’s children and asks if we’ve got anything to share. In a world that is full of every kind of hunger, he asks Easter people to respond to the resurrection good news by *embodying* it. By showing up. By sharing our gifts. By giving what we have - and, in so doing, rejecting an escapist “pie in the sky, by and by” kind of spirituality that has no concern for the living of *these* days, for the living in *these* bodies. By letting our very living, here and now, proclaim what we believe is ultimately true and that changes everything: That he is risen. He is risen indeed.

I cannot think about what it might mean for us to *embody* our faith without thinking about two saints of First Presbyterian Church in Raleigh - one who was healthy, the other who was dying. They agreed on precisely nothing - not theologically, not politically, not practically. Both on the Session at the time, they routinely canceled out each other’s votes. You could count on it walking into every meeting. And one of them needed a kidney. He was surprised one night to receive a call from the other, who offered to get tested to see if he was a match. Which he was. The local paper ran the story of their surgeries with a picture of the two of them in

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side-by-side wheelchairs, donning hospital gowns and giant grins. And at the center of that picture you can see their hands clasped together, with conviction, and in joy. And I'll never forget what the donor said to me when I asked him why he did what he did. “We've been in the same Sunday School class for over a decade,” he said. “And the guy drives me crazy. But I guess this was God's way of asking me to stop being so theoretical about everything, and to try to live as if it were all true.”

And all I could say in the face of that incredible, embodied witness was, “Indeed.”

Such an embodiment of the faith happens all the time, in big ways and small - but all profound. When I was serving as a hospital chaplain in a New Jersey ICU, I made a daily morning visit to a patient's husband for about a week or so. I didn't plan it this way, but I happened to be there about the same time every morning. And every morning that week, a woman would peek her head behind the curtain and set down a cup of hot coffee for him, and duck back out. She never came in, and so I assumed she was another family member just giving us the space to talk for a minute. Finally, I asked him who she was. And, to my surprise, he said, “Oh, actually, I have no idea. She's here with someone a few rooms over. But she's been doing this for a few weeks now, and I have to say that, every day, this cup of coffee feels truly life-saving to me.”

Indeed.

Indeed Living happens all the time around here, too, in this body of Christ. I saw it at a recent memorial service, as members of our Funeral Guild opened doors, and poured cold water, and passed out bulletins, and hugged the grieving, and pointed people to where they needed to go. I see it every time someone comes to drop off a meal in the cooler outside our kitchen for a family that going through a major life transition. I see it every time our pantry's shelves are being stocked by the same familiar hands, and every time I visit a member, only to spot a stack of cards full of notes of encouragement and prayers for healing that are written in your script. In all these ways and so many more, you have been and continue to be the hands and feet of Christ right here, in the heart of Charlotte. You're witnessing, in ways big and small, but all profound, to resurrection hope, here and now, proclaiming in your living that the risen Christ walks among us, and doesn't shy away from our hunger, but transforms it...by asking us not to shy away from it either.

This is a different kind of Easter message, isn't it? One that moves us beyond the fanfare of Easter morning with its brass and lilies and flowered crosses and coordinated outfits, from the celebration of resurrection to the practice of it. Verse 41 says that he shows up into the disciples' Easter joy in a hungry body, and helps them orient to this new reality called resurrection as he anticipates his ascension. Notice that Jesus doesn't speak from a place of impatience at the disciples' slowness to understand it. Maybe he's not even asking them to understand it at all, but simply to live as if it is true.

Writing in the 16th century, St. Teresa of Avila echoes the risen Christ's call this way:

“Christ has no body but yours,” she says.

“No hands, no feet on earth but yours,

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Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

My friends, we are the body of Christ. And we proclaim a risen Lord - not just in some far-off, heavenly future, but here and now. And the question, I think, that is before us today is what we will do with our Easter joy in a world where children still say, in every language, “Mommy, I’m hungry.” In a world where so many children of God hunger for the basic things that make for human flourishing while others have more than enough. The question before us today is how we will embody our Easter joy in a world where so many hearts hunger - for friendship, for encouragement, for a second chance, for hope that is tangible. The question before us is whether or not we will practice resurrection - whether we will see in every hand that needs holding, every step that needs steadying, every stomach that needs feeding, every voice that needs an ear, the opportunity to encounter the risen Lord in the need of our neighbors. And to let our lives do the preaching. With whatever gifts we have been given, to the glory of God.

May it be so in us, indeed.

Amen.