

3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

READ: LUKE 24:36B-48

"Touch me and see;
for a ghost does not
have flesh and bones
as you see that I
have."

REFLECT:

Last weekend I went for a walk in beautiful Evenly Wood Gardens with my sister and her family. It was the first time we'd been physically together in several months, and it was a delight. My 5 year old niece talked non-stop; showing me her wobbly tooth, demonstrating how she'd learned to whistle, filling me in on all her important news. Her younger brother was shy at first but soon joining in. We had all kept in regular contact through telephone and video calls during lockdown but there was something so much richer more real about being together "in the flesh", walking and talking and stopping at the outdoor cafe to eat cake together.

Today's gospel story of the risen Jesus standing among the disciples as "flesh and bones", showing them his wounded hands, inviting their touch, eating grilled fish with them, is a similarly physical reunion. The writer seems at pains to emphasize that the risen Jesus is not a ghost or a spirit, he has a fully functioning body.

In his presence the Scriptures take on a three-dimensional quality too. What was already known in an intellectual, abstract sense is brought to life when applied to the disciples' lived experience. This is contextual theology. Ours is an embodied, incarnational faith.

The crisis we have lived through together over the past year has highlighted how fallible our bodies are, how mortal, how vulnerable to disease. We have had to come to terms with the ways our physical proximity might endanger us and others; how our bodies, our breath, our touch can carry and transmit infection. And yet this year has made me appreciate flesh and bones in a new way. I hope never again to take for granted the wondrous gifts of life, breath, health, a fully functioning body, the act of gathering for worship in a physical space, the atmosphere and sensory experience of being in church, sitting around a table to share a meal or cup of tea, communal singing, live theatre or music, and generally being in the physical presence of other humans.

CONNECT:

This week I encourage you to find ways to give your body some attention and love. What this entails will be very individual - it might be as simple as allowing it to rest or eating well or making the doctor's appointment you've been putting off. Perhaps enjoying a brisk walk or a long, luxurious soak in the bath. Maybe experiencing the pleasure of movement through dance, yoga or simple stretches. Breathing or relaxation exercises to calm and centre your body. Soaking your feet, moisturising your skin, massaging muscles or joints that are stiff or sore... the possibilities are endless...

PRAY:

- Give thanks for your body; even with its frailty and limitations it's a wondrous thing.
- Give thanks for the hopeful possibility of physical reunions, and pray that when we come together we will do so safely.
- For those who are living through pain or illness and those whose bodies are failing.
- For those who care for the bodies of the sick and the dead.

RESOURCES AND CONTACTS:

Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website: www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

Pauline and myself, and your elders, are here for you if you need someone to talk to, have a prayer request, or just fancy a chat! Ping us an email or give us a ring.