

## *Resurrection Questions*

The Third Sunday of Easter + April 18, 2021

Church of the Ascension, Chcicago

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*... we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:3*

*While the disciples were telling how they had seen Jesus risen from the dead, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you- that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." Luke 24:36b-48*

In the first resurrection scene in the Gospel of Luke, the first words that are spoken are a question: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5a)

The question is asked of women who have come to the tomb of Jesus to care for his body, knowing it will bear the marks of his brutal, humiliating death. Instead, 'two men in dazzling clothes' appear and ask the women: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

The grieving and unsuspecting women must have been startled, and then confused. But a seed had been planted: *What if death won't have the last word after all?*

The question asked of the women at the tomb reaches past them, to each of us, in the cycles of life and death in which we all take part. We have our tombs - places in the heart where we have buried, and where we return to anoint and preserve, our losses and failures, our shame, what should have happened but did not. The familiarity of our misery there can be oddly comforting. But then as we go about our habitual tomb-rounds, the startling, divine question may take us by surprise and challenge us: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

Other questions arise in subsequent resurrection scenes in the Gospel of Luke - or in the Gospel of you or me. Not long after the women are questioned at the tomb, and on the same day, two other disciples of Jesus "were going to a village called Emmaus ... talking with each other about [the ghastly betrayal and death of Jesus during the just-finished Passover]. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And [then the question:] he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" (Luke 24:13-17a) It's a sensible question as seeming strangers meet on a road and strike up a conversation. But we may also hear the question for ourselves:

"What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" The question assumes a destination. Where are the meaningful connections between our words and our most important destinations? "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"

"What are you discussing with each other ... ?" Do our words stir up trouble and anxiety with or among others? Or do our words contribute to relationships of hope, comfort, encouragement, and trust? "What are you discussing with each other ... ?"

"What are you discussing ... ?" Are your words and conversations mostly fluff? Are they true? Are they meaningful? Do we even notice? Friends who recently moved to upstate New York decided to try their hand at maple syrup this spring. They enthusiastically began with 35 gallons of tree sap. By Easter Day, when they finished and bottled, they had one gallon of syrup. I wonder if a similar ratio pertains to my words and conversations – 35 evaporate for every one that has value for me or anyone else. Jesus is resurrected but still unrecognized when he asks two of his followers a question that may provoke any of us: "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"

A third and final resurrection scene in the Gospel of Luke is presented to us on this third Sunday of Easter. The two followers from the Road to Emmaus are now part of a larger group, back in Jerusalem. *Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.* But now, listen carefully – it's a double-question: Jesus "said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?'" (Luke 24:36-38) It doesn't take much – does it? – for this query to slip past the original narrative and into the land of fears and doubts in our own lives. 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?' Take some time in this Easter season, if you will, to recognize, acknowledge and name your fears and doubts. Lay them out in the open. Hard as that may be, you may well be making way for a new resurrection appearance of Jesus.

That would be a great last line for this message, I recognize, but Jesus asks one more question in this scene, and I ask you to take a moment to hear it with me. After that double-question about fear and doubt, Jesus exposes his wounded hands and feet to his gathered followers. As recognition sinks in, they are overcome by a jumble of emotions: *in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering.* Maybe it's OK for you and me to feel and express contradictions with regard to Jesus and his resurrection. Listen again: *in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering.*

Then Jesus responds to this emotional collage with a question. It initially seems odd for the context: *Have you anything here to eat?* (Luke 24:41b) Jesus may have been legitimately hungry. Or maybe, by eating, he aimed to prove that he was not a ghost. Later, those disciples could and would say, *It really was him. He was resurrected in the body. We saw him eat a fish!*

Apart from this theological angle, the mundane question about food is also a means by which Jesus is reaching out to them, to reestablish familiar relationship. Most of our mothers taught most of us that it's rude, when we are guests in the home of another, to ask for food. But when we are hungry with family or close friends, it's the most natural thing in the world to ask: *Have you anything here to eat?* Jesus is signaling that even in resurrection he wants to be 'at home' with them – with us.

This reaching out by Jesus to connect in resurrection, here and elsewhere, seems to have been recognized, understood and passed along by many, including the author of today's Epistle lesson. "We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

What question might Jesus, the resurrected One, ask in order to make clear that he wants to be 'at home' with you? Amen.