

God is vitally connected with the physical creation

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

Easter 3b – Luke 24 36b-48, Acts 3 12-20

The Emmaus travellers have just got back to Jerusalem and the various disciples are exchanging their stories. They even say Peter has seen Jesus alive! Everyone's saying *the Lord has risen indeed!* And then Jesus himself stands among them and says, *Peace be with you.* But now when he appears among them, they take him for a ghost!

Is this what days of terrible grief make you do; avoid easy hope; avoid risking further pain? Jesus shows them he is physically resurrected. Just like he did at Emmaus where he broke bread, food is involved here too. He eats with them.

At the Easter day service, I mentioned a strange thing we keep being told about the risen Jesus. On the one hand, his closest friends don't recognise him, but on the other, they twig to who he must be when he eats with them – or says their name. He's the same person, yet somehow very different.

In John's gospel, we're told that the risen Jesus somehow gets past locked doors. And in John, as in Luke, he eats with his friends. In both Gospels, he's not recognised, then he is. What are they telling us? Is he spirit or is he body? Are the gospel-writers describing some different order of being here? It looks like it.

Whether we take the resurrection story of Jesus literally or metaphorically, the story *is* that in Jesus, the God who is spirit, took on a physical body, lived a physical life, died a physical death, and in whatever form, rose again as a physical being. That's a profound affirmation of physicality –

reaffirmation really, because the biblical story also tells of God as creator of a physical universe.

This says that an idea we've absorbed from our culture that spirit is pure and godly, whereas physical is somehow inferior – this is not what the scriptures are telling us. Yet, I think it's a belief that has long distorted the way Christians have thought about ourselves, *and* the way we've thought about *creation* too.

Sometimes the Church seems to let people believe that our physical life and physical environment are not the really important parts of our existence. Have you ever seen funeral notices with the epitaph *Called Home*?

What's that meant to say about what this life here has meant? And what does it say about our planet home – this creation? Temporary; some sort of waiting room?

I think this has a lot to do with the fact that the Christian world is deeply responsible for the mind-set which has permitted the destruction of the natural world. In fact committed Christians are often the loudest voices lobbying for its continued exploitation because they think the Bible says we'll get a new one.

The resurrection narrative tells us again that God always was, and still is, vitally connected with the physical creation; committed to our nurture and restoration, and to the nurture and restoration of the whole creation. That has serious implications for the way we treat each other and our earth. It's something we need to explore together. It reminds me of that famous charge from St Teresa of Avila ...

Christ has no body now on earth but ours, no hands but ours, no feet but ours, ours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion is to look out to the earth, ours are the feet by which Christ is to go about doing good and ours are the hands by which Christ is to bless others now.

I want to finish by making a few observations about the change in Peter from the Gospel story to the way he behaves later on – the way we see him in today's reading from Acts. Before Easter, we saw what he was like; blustering and overconfident, then completely overcome with terror – committed to self-preservation at any cost. But in the gospel today, we saw him set out alone to check the women's story. The change is under way.

So in Acts, we meet him with John brazenly going to preach in the Temple – apparently on a regular basis. Doing that is what got Jesus killed, and now Peter's doing it. What an astounding change. Something's changed him utterly. What does that mean for you and me? What would it take for you or me to risk so much?

We're told in painful detail how reluctant Jesus' disciples were to accept the truth of his resurrection. And yet, a short time later, the book of Acts shows them utterly transformed. Their new unparalleled hope is the Easter message that has rung out down the ages. And now ours are the mouths that have this message to proclaim in a world that is daily in more desperate need of hope. May we be so bold and do so! Amen