

Matter matters. Christianity makes this unique assertion. Matter matters. We believe that a little over 2,000 years ago, the sovereign Lord and Creator of the universe came to dwell among us as one of us.

That's often our focus at Christmas. God took on our human nature, and our human material existence. God became Emmanuel, God with us, God as one of us.

This belief sets us apart from every other religion in the world. The idea is blasphemy to Jews and Muslims. God is one they proclaim, therefore God could never become a human being.

To many Eastern religions, the ultimate goal is to free the spirit from the shackles of the body. The idea that God would choose to dwell in a body is preposterous to them. To them matter is often evil or twisted, only the spirit is pure. Their goal is often to find a way to release their pure souls from the prison of their bodies.

And we even have echoes of that in our culture. We sometimes think of our bodies as shells, as vessels containing our soul. "John Brown's body lies a moldering in the grave but his soul goes marching on." That's a common cultural belief. But it's not the good news revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus, Christians have to make a different claim. We believe that in Jesus, God chose to take on a body. God chose to become incarnate. God chose to become a being of flesh and blood. Christians believe that matter matters. It matters enough that Jesus became matter for our sake.

William Temple was the Archbishop of Canterbury back during World War II. He once wrote that Christianity is the most materialistic of all religions. And he's exactly right. Christianity is materialistic. Not in the sense of greedy materialism. The point of Christianity is not to make us endless acquirers and consumers of products that come down the line.

But matter does matter. God created a material world and said that it was good. When that material world had fallen, God sent his only begotten Son in a material body to redeem that material world.

And after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples in a glorified yet real body. Luke makes it a point to make sure that we understand this.

In today's reading, the resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples. He appears in the room with them, and says, "Peace be with you."¹

We see the disciples' reaction: "They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost."² They thought it was simply Jesus' spirit appearing to them. An apparition. Something disembodied.

¹ Lk 24:36

² Lk 24:37

So Jesus reassures them. And it's important to look at the way he does it. He tells them to look at the reality of his resurrected body.

He says, "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."³

Apparently, this isn't enough. So he does something else. "He said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?'"

And then Luke says, "They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence."⁴

The Easter proclamation is not that Jesus has passed from this material world into a spiritual realm. It is not that Jesus' body lies moldering in the grave but his soul goes marching on. Instead, the Good News of Easter is that Jesus has a new bodily existence, a body different from yet similar to his earthly body.

The resurrected Jesus is not some free-floating Spirit. Rather, the resurrected Jesus has a new and wondrous type of body, but a real body nonetheless.

Yes, the resurrected Jesus can appear and disappear at will, even in a locked room. So there is something different about the nature of his new body.

But it is still a body with material substance. It is a body that can be touched and seen. It is a body that allows him to eat and drink with his disciples. It is real, and it is material. And Jesus tells his disciples, "You are witnesses of these things."⁵

Last week, our Epistle lesson was beginning of the First Letter of John. John starts that letter with this statement: "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life."⁶

Did you notice those verbs? Heard. Seen. Looked at. Touched. It's hard to get much more material than that.

And, John tells us, that which he had heard, and seen, and touched, that which he and others had witnessed, he now tells us about.

And that goes right along with what Jesus says at the end of our Gospel today: "You are witnesses of these things."

³ Lk 24:38-40

⁴ Lk 24:43

⁵ Lk 24:48

⁶ 1Jn 1:1

That's our job as Christians. Jesus has touched your life in some way. Otherwise you wouldn't be here. There is something that you've seen, or touched, or heard, that brings you here.

Maybe you've heard the proclamation of the good news and it touched your heart. Maybe you've seen God's hand at work in your lives. Maybe you've felt God's touch in the hands of someone ministering to you. Maybe you've touched God in the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

And you who have been touched by the Lord, and you who have touched the Lord, are witnesses of these things. You are witnesses of the living presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

Your actions bear witness to the power of his living presence. Your hands serve as his hands in the world. When you volunteer to serve others. When you help a child. When you offer prayer for others. When you reach out and talk to someone who is lonely. When you give of your time, talent, and treasure. When you take time Sunday after Sunday to come into his living presence to offer worship and praise... "You are witnesses of these things"

God has created you out of matter with the gift of a material body. May you use that gift of your body to carry out the work of Jesus' Body in the world. May you witness to the power of his resurrected life in the way you live your life. That's what really matters.