

In the name of the Father, ✠Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The stories of Jesus' resurrection appearances in the Bible tread a very fine line. On the one hand, it's clear that the risen Jesus is not a ghost. The stories stress his physical, corporeal presence: in this morning's gospel the disciples are invited to touch his wounds, he eats fish and, in John's gospel, Jesus cooks breakfast for the disciples on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias. On the other hand, it's clear that the risen Jesus is not simply a resuscitated corpse. His bodily presence is somewhat strange: this is a body which the disciples struggle to recognise as Jesus, and a body which seems to appear and disappear as if from nowhere. It's all very odd, and the difficulty which film-makers have in depicting the resurrection appearances of Jesus indicate that it's just very difficult for us to imagine what might be going on here.

But in a sense, Christ's identity and his bodily presence is always strange and shifting throughout the gospels. This is a body which heals other bodies, which walks on water, which takes a couple of fish and some bread and feeds thousands, which is transfigured. And then at the Passover supper we have Jesus with his disciples taking bread and wine and saying 'This is my body', 'This is my blood'. And very soon we'll be celebrating the ascension – another shift in the bodily identity and presence of Christ. And all the time the disciples want to hold on to Christ: Mary Magdalene at the tomb clinging to her Lord; the travellers to Emmaus in this morning's gospel saying to their unrecognised companion as he leaves them on the road 'no, stay with us, a little longer...'

What are we to make of this strange and constantly shifting identity and presence of Jesus Christ? Here's just one way of thinking about it. The Israelites had built the Temple in Jerusalem not as the place where they might

keep God, but as the place where God had promised to meet them. This is where they would find God. But now, we have a promise that God will meet us not in a place, but in a person: in Jesus Christ. Whereas the High Priest had entered the holy of holies on the day of atonement, as it were *looking for God*, now God, in the great high priest Jesus Christ, goes looking for his people. But Jesus Christ is not simply a man who lived a couple of thousand years ago. Christ's constantly shifting identity and presence, from the baby born in Bethlehem to the risen and ascended Lord, is moving outwards. As St. Paul puts it in Ephesians, Christ moves outwards 'to fill all in all'. From the Temple Christ moves out to Golgotha, his crucified presence amongst the utterly lost. Outside the city, moving beyond its bounds, the risen Christ is present to his disciples. And in today's gospel, in Jerusalem the disciples are gathered to be told that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all nations,

beginning from Jerusalem. God in Christ, the crucified and risen Christ, is moving out to look for the lost.

Like the disciples gathered in Jerusalem who are greeted by their risen Lord, we are gathered here this morning with our risen Lord. And like the disciples, we are gathered only to be sent out again. We will be sent carrying in ourselves the corporeal, Eucharistic presence of Christ, broken up as a people to move out, moving beyond the boundaries of this church to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins. That's the essence of the Christian, Eucharistic mystery: that we are gathered only to be broken, to bear in ourselves the constantly shifting and moving presence of Christ out into the world, that he might fill all in all. As St. Paul puts it so beautifully to the Corinthians, we bear about in our body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also might be manifest in our bodies.

Remember always the very material, physical character of all this. It's one of the curses of modern day 'spirituality' and common secular assumptions about religion, that we're apparently not concerned with material things, as if material, physical reality were somehow too base or full of temptation. If material reality can shine with the presence and light of the infinite God – if God can be incarnate and, by a crucified and risen body gather his people to himself – then in principle there are no limits to what material reality, the likes of you and me as physical creations, might show forth. There's no limit to what something physical might be: a wafer bearing the sacramental presence of Christ. There is no part of creation, no dark corner, no aspect of human nature or life, body or soul, which is not touched by Christ's risen presence. There's no lab or lecture room or library or business or court to which we might not carry Christ's risen presence. There's no place where repentance and forgiveness of sins are not to be proclaimed and shown

forth. There is nowhere, no part of human life, that is not, therefore, the concern of the Church, that is not our concern. The Church is not an institution for a private spirituality locked in these holy walls. For we leave today bearing Christ in our bodies – the dying and living of Christ – that this strange, unfathomable and often unrecognisable presence which we witness in the breaking of bread, might fill all in all. You bear in your body the dying of Jesus, the dying to self, that the life of Jesus, the new life, might also be manifest in you for the world.