Imagine trying to convince someone that you’re alive. I don’t mean trying to look alert after listening to me preach. I’m thinking of the challenge of actually having to prove that you’re not physically dead when your family and friends might have watched you die. Give this challenge a few moments to sink in. The process might be similar to someone who has stolen your identity, a common theft that now happens on the internet. People who have experienced identity theft have shared how difficult it is to prove their true identity with the DMV, Social Security, or with their credit card companies, and the list of proving you exist is extensive.

Fast backward to the first century as Jesus tries to prove that he is actually alive after being dead. Jesus bumps into the same issue as we might with identity proof, is Jesus really alive or is he a ghost, as the disciples express in our Luke reading this morning. Even the sound of his post-grave voice terrifies these followers. Exactly why they believe they are seeing a ghost is unclear. I would imagine they have no other word to explain the presence of Jesus standing among them.

Jesus, however, doesn’t wait long to show the 11 disciples that he is not only alive, but he is standing in their presence. Jesus says, “*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*.’”

Each resurrection appearance by Jesus is a bodily resurrection. Resurrection is no metaphor. Spirits and ghosts don’t bleed, so Jesus takes his own blood-scarred hands and feet and puts them right in front of the disciples’ faces. “It’s OK to touch me,” he says, a bit like a dog owner trying to convince a scared kid that this thing with four legs and sharp teeth won’t bite them.

Yet the disciples remain unconvinced, disbelieving that Jesus is really standing in the flesh before their eyes. So, Jesus tries to gather their trust by asking: “Have you anything here to eat?” I smile whenever I hear this question because I remember back when my kids had their friends over at the house and how they couldn’t wait to receive permission to raid the refrigerator. Often their first question would be, “Have you anything here to eat?” Or I would already see them sitting down at the kitchen table munching away.

Luke informs us that the savior of the world, in one of his first utterances out of the grave, asks for food. He doesn’t make a pronouncement about the coming age or the nature of what it means to die and rise. He asks if there’s anything in the fridge. More than likely, Jesus is determined to try to help these disciples know that he is not a ghost.

They hand him a piece of broiled fish, and he chews and swallows it, right then and there. If the disciples are looking for God to be some wispy spiritual being, or philosophical concept, or metaphor, or ghost, what they get instead is the Lord of heaven and earth chewing on broiled fish. Their God and ours proves to be a flesh and blood God, not a disembodied spirit. This God is vulnerable to everything that is human, including the capability of being hurt and spilling tears. Not a ghoulie or ghostie at all, God is at home in the flesh, wearing everything from bones and nerve endings to taste buds and a digestive tract. This post-resurrection body that eats and shares a meal with the disciples is real in every way.

As with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, table fellowship is necessary to recognizing the truth of the Gospel. Jesus doesn’t need a T-shirt with the words, “I eat, therefore I am.” He simply demonstrates that he is made of flesh. He takes the piece of fish and eats it. If one can’t eat, one doesn’t live. Visit an elderly friend who’s lying weak in a nursing home. You’ll see the aides doing everything they can to encourage your friend to eat, even if it’s only a spoonful of pudding for the day. Patients in the hospital recovering from surgery will not receive discharge orders from their physician until they can eat more than Jell-O cubes and prove that their digestive system is fully alive.

From the earliest story of God molding people out of dirt to the one where Jesus breaks bread one final time before his death, God revels in physicality. This should remind us, among other things, not to make faith a solely academic process. The practice of faith in a living God requires our whole bodies, not just our minds.

It is only at this point that Jesus begins to explain to the Eleven what the women and the disciples on the road to Emmaus had already understood—that Jesus had fulfilled the scriptures. Jesus explains to them that everything that has happened has already been revealed in “Moses, the prophets, and the psalms” (24:44). Only after experiencing his body and sharing food with him were the minds of the Eleven opened to understand the scriptures.

So too, perhaps, it is for us. Those of us who occupy centers of power often have the most difficulty grasping the possibilities of resurrected life. We have the most difficult time trying to understand that a narrative other than what science has told us is possible, for we have been centered within it. We struggle to recognize an alternative reality of abundance and new life working its way in from the edges of our existing structure. Jesus, as only Jesus can do with succinct words says, “You are witnesses of these things.” We are those witnesses today.

The writers of our gospels thought it was important to bring these post-resurrection narratives forward for future generations of Jesus followers. They knew that Jesus didn’t have a problem with doubt, discouragement, or unbelief, but they also understood the importance of demonstrating that the body of Jesus died, but came back to life to visit them.

Our life of faith in Jesus may be marked by hills or mountains. It may be peppered with storms and pitfalls of doubt and confusion. There may be periods of clear, smooth sailing, just as there will surely be times of trial and tribulation. Jesus, would say, “That’s okay. I understand your suffering.” Jesus, would also say, as he did to the disciples, “You are witnesses of these things.”

And, this is where, you might say, the finger of Jesus is pointed at us. We are the current witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. What will we do with this challenge? Are there ways of being a Christian that need to change for the witness of Jesus to be revealed in The Dalles? Are their current power structures within our own church or diocese that need to change for the witness of Jesus to be revealed? Does our current building at 1805 Minnesota Street need to change to be a witness for Jesus in The Dalles? How will we live into our job description of being a witness to the life of Jesus, a witness to the death of Jesus, and a witness to the life of Jesus? This is what it means to be a follower of Jesus. We bring our whole being, our mind, our body, our spirit, and say, “I will be a witness to these things.” Amen.