

**Psalm 4:1** Answer me when I call, O God, defender of my cause; you set me free when I am hard-pressed; have mercy on me and hear my prayer. (27)

## Introduction

I'm not afraid of physical pain—the sore and strain of bones and muscles.<sup>1</sup> As an athlete, one must endure pain to be good. To build muscle, muscle must be torn down and rebuilt, a painful process. I am eager to learn new skills, so, know the demands for discomfort that comes with learning. It's physically awkward to learn new moves, new postures, new holds. I wasn't afraid to enter 14 hours of heavy contractions without medication as my son Jack attempted to make his debut on a hot August day in 2008. (With every contraction, Jack hit every bone he could before the midwife called the c-section—his head being too big to pass through my structure.) I'm that ridiculous person who says: *no pain, no gain*. If something is too easy, I immediately think: *what am I doing wrong*. Always looking for the next level because, to quote Will-I-Am as Pedro in the animated movie *Rio*: “Come on! This ain't the level. The next level is the level.”

However, throw in a sudden shot of mental anguish and everything changes. While I won't flee from physical pain, mental anguish is something altogether more painful to me. The mind takes over and anxiety surges in the body. Chaos starts to swirl in my mind and around me; my refuge of safety—my mind palace—is under siege. I am ushered into the crevasse opening under my feet, threatening to swallow me. Trying to fight against the discomfort (working, reading, running, tasking, scrolling, etc.) or pretending that everything is just fine (#fakeittillyoumakeit), makes it worse. The harder I fight and ignore, the worse the discomfort gets. I am no match to resist this Apollyon<sup>2</sup> seeking to destroy me on this journey, eager to drive me to the brink and edge of myself into oblivion.

## Luke 24:36-48

Now, as they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood in the middle of them and said to them, “Peace to you.” But being terrified and becoming full of fear, they were thinking they were looking at a spirit. And Jesus said to them, “Why are you disturbed and why are thoughts coming up in your hearts? Experience my hands and my feet that *I am*<sup>3</sup> myself. Touch me and experience that a spirit has not flesh and bones just as you behold me having.” Then after saying this he showed them [his] hands and feet. (Lk 24:36-40)

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<sup>1</sup> I'm not including here physical pain from chronic illness. I group that under mental anguish because of the toll it takes on the mind and body. Also, as someone who has not suffered with chronic illness, I cannot speak to it. I wanted to add this here so people know I'm aware of the physical pain of Chronic Illness.

<sup>2</sup> Reference to the antagonist in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*

<sup>3</sup> The *εγω εμι* here is a loaded term, so I emphasized it. The Greek reads “...εγω εμι αυτος” thus a literal translation would be “I, I am myself.” Whenever you see the personal pronoun with the verb in Greek there's a needed emphasis. I also think Luke is intentional with the wording and order; the great I AM is with them. God is with the Beloved.

Luke is clear about the mental anguish of the disciples when Jesus appears in the middle of them.<sup>4</sup> He is clear: Jesus showing up didn't immediately bring the comfort we might think/hope it would. The language Luke uses is thematically like the language Mark used to describe the women arriving at an open tomb on Easter morning. Divine movement in human time and space is terrifying even if it's good.<sup>5,6</sup> Divine activity here always alters reality as we know it—there's nothing comforting about this. When God moves, things will change; we don't like change, especially when it destroys what we know to be true. The tomb is opened; the women were terrified and seized with fear. The Crucified Christ shows up; the men are terrified and full of fear.

Jesus declares: *Peace to you!* Yet, fear and trembling persisted. Even if this declaration of peace was understood as the *shalom* that is peace with God thus salvation, it wasn't all that the disturbed disciples needed.<sup>7</sup> These men were in mental anguish; speaking "peace" wasn't enough. Jesus recognizes this. His response? He names what is going with these men: *why are you disturbed? Why are reasonings coming up in your heart? I am myself!*<sup>8</sup> In other words, I see you and feel you. Jesus is truly there *with* them; in solidarity with them. But calling a thing what it is isn't all Jesus does.

He knows something else must happen to relieve the disturbedness. *Behold my hands; gaze upon my feet; see for yourself that I am who I am and that I am here with you!* These terrified people needed to touch Jesus to know he was real. It wasn't enough for Jesus to speak peace; he needed to show them his wounded hands and feet. He stood among them and held out his hands, *experience the holes from the nails that held me to the cross; gaze at death's feeble attempt to keep God and my beloved apart; behold, not even death can exile you from me.* And they touched him. When they did, their terror and fear turned to doubt because of joy (v.41); this was too good to be true. Doubt still existed, but it's source was the good news they felt with their hands as they touched the body of Jesus.<sup>9</sup> They reached out with trembling hands,

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<sup>4</sup> Gonzalez *Luke Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* Eds. Ay Plantinga Pauw and William C. Placher. Louisville, KY: WJK, 2010. 279 "The theological emphasis of this passage lies on the true, physical resurrection of Jesus. The disciples think that what they are seeing may be his ghost, a story parallel to the reaction of other disciples in Acts when Peter returns to them unexpectedly."

<sup>5</sup> Joel B. Green TNICNT *The Gospel of Luke* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1997. 852 "...the Evangelist [Luke] places a premium on 'seeing.'...Initial points of contact with accounts of angelic appearances signal the wonder of this moment, while points of contrast indicate the reality of Jesus' resurrection. ...Luke's narrative affirms a resurrected Jesus over against these other options for the afterlife current in the Hellenistic world."

<sup>6</sup> Green 855, In re Luke's use of "Joy" "What they were experiencing was simply too good to be true."

<sup>7</sup> Green 854, "Within the Third Gospel, 'peace' is metonymic for 'salvation,' so that, in this co-text, Jesus' greeting takes on an enlarged meaning. The Emmaus travelers imagined that his rejection and crucifixion had rendered Jesus incapable of serving as Israel's redeemer; here, following his death, though, he communicates or transmits continue salvation to those gathered."

<sup>8</sup> Green 854-5, "...Jesus is now represented as alive beyond the grave as an embodied person. Jesus' affirmation is emphatic—'it is I myself!' 'It is really me!'—intimating continuity between these phases of Jesus' life, before crucifixion and after resurrection."

<sup>9</sup> Green 855, "Nestled between these two demonstrations of materiality is a transparent indication that such exhibitions are insufficient for producing the desired effects This is consistent with the emphasis through ch. 24 on

like the shepherds did back at Christmas, and touched the very flesh of God and were not reduced to dust but into new life. *The Lord is Risen!*

## Conclusion

The only way the disciples moved from their fear and terror at Jesus's presence was through and not around. So it is with us. The only way for me to pass through my mental anguish, my fear and terror, my panic and anxiety is to sit and feel, to face and acknowledge, to look it in the eyes, touch it, call it for what it is, and exist there. Referring to the EnneaThought for this past Friday, "...if we stay present to our discomfort, we will also feel something else arising—something more real, capable, sensitive, and exquisitely aware of ourselves and of our surroundings."<sup>10</sup> The beginning of release comes in facing the reality of what is and moving through and from there; this becomes our sure foundation: embracing the truth, naming the feelings, and admitting our weakness and problem.

When Jesus walked the earth, he overturned condemning material systems birthed from human judgment. In his resurrected material<sup>11</sup> life, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, flips time and space—like he did tables in the temple—and brings with him the women and men whom he encounters into the divine reign. Christ's resurrected material presence on earth among people indicates that God's reign is not merely spiritual, but physical, too; this (all) is God's good creation.<sup>12</sup>

The rest is in making our home where we live and standing in solidarity with our neighbors rather than escaping it through fighting against Apollyon and turning blind eyes.

The stars, the moon, they have all been blown out  
You left me in the dark  
And no dawn, no day, I'm always in this twilight  
In the shadow of your heart

I took the stars from my eyes, an then I made a map  
And knew that somehow I could find my way back  
Then I heard your heart beating, you were in the darkness too  
So I stayed in the darkness with you<sup>13</sup>

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the inherent ambiguity of 'facts' and, thus, the absolute necessity of interpretation. Not even controvertible evidence of Jesus' embodied existence is capable of producing faith; resolution will come only when scriptural illuminate is added to material data."

<sup>10</sup>*The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, 37

<sup>11</sup> Gonzalez *Luke 279*, "The Jesus who repeatedly ate with his disciples, with sinners, with publicans, wand with Pharisees now eats his last meal before leaving his disciples in the ascension. He does this in order to prove that he is not a just a vision or a ghost, that he has really conquered death."

<sup>12</sup> Gonzalez *Luke 279*, "The one whose life the church shares in Word and Sacrament is not a ghost or a disembodied spirit. He is the risen Lord. Those who serve him do not serve a moral or religious principle, nor just the natural spiritual urges of humankind; they serve one like themselves, yet Lord of all."

<sup>13</sup> Florence and the Machine "Cosmic Love"

The material presence of Christ with the disciples makes it impossible for us to reduce problems and their solutions of our world to the spiritual. In other words, our presence in the world toward our neighbor must be more than “thoughts and prayers” or the ludicrous assertion people should pull themselves out of their suffering and oppression by their own bootstraps. We must look at the violence in our country and call it what it is: life denying and anti-human. To quote the biblical scholar, Justo Gonzalez, “The Lord who broke the bonds of death calls his followers to break the bonds of injustice and oppression,”<sup>14</sup> that which causes death. The material presence of Christ with people after his resurrection is a sure sign that, to quote womanist theologian, The Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas of Union Seminary,

The resurrection asserts the sanctity of human life as it overcomes all the forces that would deny it. The resurrection in effect makes plain the ‘wrongness’ of the crucifixion, and thus of all crucifying realities. It shows that death does not have the last word.<sup>15</sup>

In our encounter with God in the resurrected Christ of Easter in the event of faith, we are made into new people *in* the world. In our new life in Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit we are called to love God with our whole selves and to *also* love our neighbor as ourselves. In this encounter we are remade and reshaped (the product of repentance<sup>16</sup>), we will be “wholly transformed” through death into new life to conform to the image of Christ in the world.<sup>17</sup> If we think this means merely speaking peace and not attempting to perform this divine *shalom* into the world, then Jesus is still in the tomb, and we follow phantoms.

But we don’t follow a phantom; we follow the materially risen Lord Jesus Christ who fully affirms life (for *all* people, and especially the oppressed and suffering people<sup>18</sup>). Hope is not

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<sup>14</sup> Gonzalez *Luke* 280, “And, because his resurrection is not a merely spiritual matter, they cannot limit their service to purely spiritual matters. The Lord who showed his resurrection to his disciples by eating with them invites his followers to show his resurrection to the world by feeding the hungry.”

<sup>15</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013. 187 Here’s the full paragraph for context: “The resurrecting power of God is made fully manifest in the defeat of the ultimate power of evil represented by the cross. The resurrection is God’s definitive response to the crucifying realities. It clarifies the essential character of God’s power—a power that values life. The resurrection of the one who died such a hideous and ignominious death firmly established that God does not in any way sanction the suffering of human being. The resurrection asserts the sanctity of human life as it overcomes all the forces that would deny it. The resurrection in effect makes plain the ‘wrongness’ of the crucifixion, and thus of all crucifying realities. It shows that death does not have the last word.”

<sup>16</sup> Green 858, “Repentance’ will be a key term describing the appropriate response to the offer of salvation in Acts, and connotes the (re)alignment of one’s life—that is, dispositions and behaviors—toward God’s purpose.”

<sup>17</sup> Green 854, “‘Heart’ has already been used in vv 25 and 32, reminding Luke’s audience of the importance in these sense of the need for the inner commitments to these persons to be reshaped in light of the resurrection of Jesus. They must be wholly transformed—in disposition and attitude, cognition and affect, as well as practices and behaviors—but they continue to lack the categories for rendering this new experience of Jesus in a meaningful way. As with Jesus’ companions on the road to Emmaus, they are obtuse, slow of heart (v 25).”

<sup>18</sup> Douglas *Stand Your Ground* 188 “What the resurrection points to...is not the meaning of Jesus’s death, but of his life...The resurrection of Jesus thus solidified God’s commitment to the re restoration o life for the ‘crucified class’ of people. It reveals that there are ‘no principalities or power’ that can frustrate or foil God’s power to overcome the crucifying death in the world that not only targets but also creates a ‘crucified class’ of people To restore to

lost; faith is not abandoned. Prayer informs our praxis, rendering the space of our activity divine space. We are indwelled with the holy spirit, God of very God. Where there is death, we bring life; where there is midnight, we shine light; where there is hunger, we bring food; where there is terror and fear we, the beloved, bring comfort to the beloved. Our hands extend to the downtrodden and we lift up, behold Christ's hand. Our feet stand in solidarity with black and brown bodies threatened at every turn; behold Christ's feet.

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life those whose bodies are the particular targets of the world's violence is to signal the triumph over crucifying violence and death itself....The crucifixion-resurrection event points to the meaning found in Jesus' life, not his death. By understanding the resurrection in light of the cross, we know that crucifying realities do not have the last word, and, thus, cannot take away the value of one's life. The meaning of one's life, in other words, is not found in death and is not vitiated by it."