



# Our God Reigns: The Body of the Risen Lord in Luke 24

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A LOCAL TELEVISION STATION PLAYS THE TAPE OF A 911 CALL FROM AN AN-  
guished mother who came home to find her precious ten-year-old daughter lying dead in a pool of blood. The killer? From all indications, it is the little girl's seventeen-year-old brother. It must be painfully clear to this mother that the forces of death, chaos, and decay are still inflicting unspeakable violence, perhaps leaving her wondering how anyone can say that God reigns. If God really reigns, how can the world stay so "unredeemed"?

The characters in Luke's gospel faced a similar question at the end of chapter 23. They had staked their very lives on the claim of Jesus that God, in faithfulness to his promises, had already set in motion a reversal of the current order, that his kingdom was at hand, that God was about to "redeem Israel." But they knew that Jesus had suffered and died a scandalous and shameful death at the hands of their oppressors, the Roman empire. Nothing in chapter 23 indicates to the characters that Jesus expects to be raised from the dead, at least not until the general resurrection of all the dead.<sup>1</sup> When the centurion recognizes Jesus' innocence (v. 47) and the gathered crowds go home beating their breasts as an expression of re-

<sup>1</sup>Before he dies, Jesus promises one of the thieves that he would be with him that day in "paradise" (23:44). While there were a variety of understandings of "paradise," Luke reflects a fairly common understanding of the term. It was a place where the righteous go upon their death, a kind of temporary holding tank of blessedness between their death and the final resurrection and judgment. Although one might conceivably speak of going there upon their death, one would not describe the trip as being raised from the dead.

*In the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, God has begun the ultimate reversal of the current social and political order. In resurrection, God remains faithful to creation, redeeming it in its entirety.*

gret (v. 48), they merely acknowledge that once again the current political order has prevailed. Israel was not redeemed from Rome's oppression, and the empire had killed an innocent man who dared proclaim the coming reign of God in the face of the present reign of Rome. By all appearances, Jesus, Mary, and John the Baptist had all been wrong in announcing the arrival of God's reign, of his salvation, of a world made right.

In what follows, we will journey with Luke as he narrates the appearances of the risen Lord in chapter 24. By focusing on the way that he orders his narrative and particularly on the way he portrays the body of the risen Lord, I will argue that: (1) Luke narratively portrays the ultimate reversal of the current political and cosmological order of things in a way that demonstrates that the reign of God has begun; (2) Luke subtly informs us that this portrayal comes to us as a divine gift, an act of divine hospitality; (3) Luke gives us a theological warrant for proclaiming the redemption of the entire cosmos and the reconciliation of relationships within it. We begin our journey by stopping briefly at the empty tomb.

#### I. LUKE'S NARRATION OF THE DISCOVERY OF THE EMPTY TOMB

In 24:1-12 Luke narrates the discovery of the empty tomb. For neither the women nor Peter is the empty tomb, by itself, particularly good news; it leads initially to confusion, perplexity, and disorientation (vv. 4-5, 12). In fact, even after the women hear the good news of Jesus having been raised and go to proclaim it, the emptiness of the tomb is still a source of "amazement" at best, as Peter leaves the tomb and simply goes home (v. 12). In light of the angels' announcement, we (the audience) know that Jesus' corpse was not abandoned in the tomb. But where does one who has been raised from the dead go? The announcement of the angels that "he is not here, but he has been raised" (v. 6) is not connected with words of location as they are in Mark and Matthew. Here, the women are told to remember what Jesus said *while he was still in Galilee* (v. 6), but not that he was going *there* ahead of the disciples (as in Mark 16:7 and Matt 28:7). Hence, Luke's narrative leaves us with a gap in our imagination as to the location of the missing embodied and risen Christ.

#### II. TO EMMAUS AND BACK AGAIN: A FORETASTE OF GOD'S FUTURE

In Luke's Gospel, journeys often function as the narrative framework within which important things happen and within which revelation is given, both to the characters and to the audience. Hence, when Luke presents us with two characters on a journey, our expectations are kindled even if the characters themselves have few expectations left. Disappointed and confused, they are expecting nothing from a report of a tomb with a missing body. Even though they had just celebrated God's great past act of redeeming Israel from slavery during Passover, their hope of God's reversing the current order of things and redeeming Israel in the near future had died on a cross, empty tomb or not. But important things happen on journeys in this gospel, and this journey is no exception.

Since Luke introduces these characters as “two of *them*,” we are to imagine that “all the things” they were discussing included the women’s repeated telling of the happenings in the empty tomb (v. 10), including the announcement of his resurrection and the messengers’ reminder that Jesus had predicted his own resurrection (v. 6, cf. 9:22). In addition, as we find out later, they are aware that others have confirmed that the tomb was indeed empty (v. 24). However, these things are not self-interpreting, and Luke does not portray the two of them having a simple “discussion” (as both the NRSV and the NIV have it). Rather, in v. 15 he pictures them *disputing* with one other, using a term, συζητεῖν, that carries the connotation that the dispute was about the meaning of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> As they are engaged in this conversation about the interpretation of Scripture as it relates to “the things concerning Jesus of Nazareth” (v. 19), the fully embodied Jesus shows up and asks what they have been *arguing* about (v. 17). But whence he comes, even the audience isn’t told. Luke simply reports that “Jesus himself came near and began walking along with them” (v. 15), remaining unrecognized by the characters in the story.

At this point in the narrative Luke gives us no further description of the risen Jesus. Thus, the narrative forces us to imagine that the very body that lay in the tomb has been raised to life. Luke will go on to make it perfectly clear that he is *not* portraying Jesus as simply a revived corpse, but at this point the narrative has not yet directed us to imagine the radical transformation of his body that has taken place.

Why then, don’t the characters recognize him? The subsequent narrative makes clear that a genuine transformation of Jesus’ body has indeed occurred. However, Luke’s point is not so much that the two disciples don’t recognize the risen Christ, because of this transformation. Rather, he informs the audience that when Jesus began walking along with them, “their eyes *were prevented* from recognizing him” (v. 16). God is the subject of the action presented in the passive voice (a “divine passive”), with the obvious implication that, had God not intervened, they would have recognized him precisely in his transformed state. Even here the story resists interpretive efforts to downplay the significant element of continuity between the body of Jesus that was buried and the embodied risen Lord. What then is the point of their eyes being “prevented from recognizing him” only later to be “opened” by God? I will return to this question at the end of this section.

After the risen Christ asks them what sort of things they’ve been arguing about, the two signal their agreement by speaking *in unison* in vv. 19b-24 about “the things concerning Jesus of Nazareth.” They both characterize Jesus as a “prophet, mighty in deed and word,” a description that brings to mind the expected “prophet like Moses” (Deut 18:15-18) who some thought might be instrumental in God’s redemption of Israel. Throughout his narrative, Luke has painted Jesus in “prophet like Moses” terms, but when he has most clearly spoken about Is-

<sup>2</sup>B. J. Koet, *Five Studies on Interpretation of Scripture in Luke-Acts* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989) 58-60. Luke’s use of other terms that could be used in a technical sense with regard to scriptural interpretation, διερμήνευσεν (v. 27) and διηνοίχθησαν/διήνοιγεν (vv. 31-32), also implies that their disagreement was over scriptural interpretation (*ibid.*, 60-64).

rael's *redemption* (1:68; 2:25, 38), as he does here, and Jesus as savior (1:69; 2:10, 30), Luke has portrayed Jesus as a royal Davidic Messiah. It is, therefore, their *messianic* hopes that have been crushed on the cross of an empire from which they had expected to be redeemed.<sup>3</sup> They also agree that some women had astounded them with a report of what the angels had said and that the tomb was confirmed to be empty. There is no disagreement on all these "things about Jesus of Nazareth."

But here they stop short, because this is where agreement ends and where confusion and disagreement begin. Their disagreement was not over what had happened or what they had hoped for, but over what to make of such things, particularly in light of Israel's Scriptures. None of "the things concerning Jesus of Nazareth" make sense in terms of their contemporary understandings of the promised Davidic Messiah and the redemption of Israel, the coming kingdom of God, or any of the various understandings of the resurrection from the dead connected with this kingdom.

After listening, Jesus begins reshaping their imagination, reshaping the categories they had used to make sense of what God was doing in their world:

"Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he *interpreted* (διερμήνευσεν) to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. (vv. 25-27)

A simple concordance search will show that the Old Testament never directly says that the Messiah will *suffer, die, or be raised from the dead*. Hence, Jesus must completely reshape the interpretive imagination of the characters by forging new connections among Messiah, suffering and death, resurrection, and the expected reign of God that will bring redemption to Israel and through Israel to the nations. To do this requires more than combining a few texts that mention a messiah with a few texts that have a figure who suffers. It requires reinterpreting the entire biblical narrative, "all the scriptures," as moving toward a climax in the events that had just transpired in Jerusalem and its surrounding environs.<sup>4</sup>

Before we move on to see how this journey turns out, we should not ignore a passing clue that begins to plug the gap in our imagination as to the location of the risen one between appearances. In v. 26 Luke portrays Jesus as having already entered into his "glory" (δόξα), the same "glory" (δόξα) in which he will return at the end of days (21:27), presumably from "the right hand of the power of God" where he will be sitting (22:69). Throughout this chapter, then, Luke is portraying the transformation of Jesus at his resurrection as that which fits him for God's coming kingdom. *This means that all the appearances in Luke 24 are appearances of*

<sup>3</sup>Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and Its Fulfillment in Lucan Christology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995) 255-258.

<sup>4</sup>See N. T. Wright, "The Resurrection and the Postmodern Dilemma," *Sewanee Theological Review* 41/2 (1998) 148.

a risen human being who has been transformed into his end-time state and has already been exalted to the right hand of God as Lord and begun to reign.<sup>5</sup> Robert Jenson's language along these lines is instructive:

The appearance stories plainly do not suppose that the risen Jesus had returned to inhabit the witnesses' time and space. Although the witnesses saw something visible and tangible in their world, between appearances the risen Jesus had no such location—he was not thought to be lodging with Mary and Martha or staying at the Jerusalem caravansary. He appeared when and as he would and then “vanished from their sight” or “withdrew from them”—neither “walked away” nor “disappeared” would be quite the right phrase. Nor were his appearances subject to the regularities of this age: “Although the doors were shut,” Jesus yet “came and stood among them....” If we ask where Jesus was—so to speak—resident during the days of the appearances, the immediately available answer is that he was in the heaven of the apocalypses, that is, in God's final future, from which he showed himself—or the Spirit showed him—to the chosen.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, when the risen one appears in this chapter, we are to imagine that he comes from the “right hand of God” and his appearances bring a foretaste of what God has in store for the future when his kingdom comes in its fullness. This observation will help bring into proper focus what happens next in the Emmaus journey.

After the two prevail upon Jesus to accept their hospitality and be their guest for the evening (v. 29), Luke portrays Jesus as changing social roles from that of a guest to that of a host. This portrait of Jesus engaging in table fellowship, giving and receiving hospitality, is a familiar one. Luke has often portrayed Jesus in this way, in a fellowship that, according to social conventions of the first century, forged enduring social bonds among those at the table. Jesus regularly engages in table fellowship with those on the margins of God's people, a graceful act of hospitality that has the effect of concretely illustrating their inclusion in the kingdom he proclaims. Remarkably, he includes at the same table people who were mortal enemies in the normal order of things. For example, he was regularly host at a table that included both a tax collector (Levi), “a collaborator with the Romans,” and a Zealot (Simon), a kind of “Jewish freedom fighter” who struggled to liberate Israel from the Romans. Jesus' table fellowship, therefore, dramatically depicted the reconciliation that characterized the kingdom he was proclaiming.

Prior to this episode, Luke has subtly shaped his audience to imagine such table fellowship as continuing at the messianic banquet when God's kingdom comes in all its fullness (13:28-29; 22:16-18). For Luke's first-century audience, if a true resurrection has occurred, the end-time kingdom of God has arrived. Hence, the picture of one whom the audience knows has been raised from the dead as Messiah breaking and distributing bread suggests that this scene is a foretaste or anticipation of the messianic banquet with Jesus as host. The future is breaking in on the

<sup>5</sup>For the exegetical details of this, see my “Ripples of the Resurrection in the Triune Life of God: Reading Luke 24 with Eschatological and Trinitarian Eyes,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* (forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup>Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997-1999) 1:197.

present as the two followers are about to feast at Messiah's table in the kingdom of God.<sup>7</sup> As host at the table, the risen Jesus embodies the future kingdom of God in the present and presides over what will be a revelatory moment for the two travelers. While the risen one is reclining there giving them bread with his crucifixion-marked hands, Luke tells us that "their eyes were opened (διηνοίχθησαν)." Again employing a divine passive, this is Luke's way of saying that God opens their eyes to recognize that the hands distributing the bread are the crucifixion-marked hands of the one who had proclaimed the coming kingdom and been executed as Messiah. But at that same revelatory moment, he vanishes both from their sight and the sight of the audience. With this encounter, Luke pushes us away from imagining the risen one as simply a revived corpse. A revived corpse, as strange as such a thing might be, would not behave like this.

Although Jesus vanishes from the two, the effects of his presence and activity do not. Reconciled at the table of the risen Lord, they are no longer "disputing" with each other over the meaning of all that has happened. Now, after a direct revelatory act from God allowing them to recognize the risen one as the one who had been crucified as Messiah, they articulate *together* how their hearts burned within them as Jesus "*opened* (διήνοιγεν) the scriptures for them" (v. 32). In this first narrated encounter with the risen Christ in his gospel, Luke emphasizes the totally unexpected nature of what had just transpired in and around Jerusalem. Throughout the gospel he has highlighted the failure of Jesus' followers to grasp the new world order being brought about by God's reign. Hence, a dual opening is necessary in this climactic chapter when Jesus' followers first encounter him as the risen one. Before they can recognize the one walking with them as the crucified and risen Messiah, the scriptures must be "opened." A context must be created in order for such a thing to make any sense. The story of Israel and Israel's God must be retold in a whole new key from the perspective of a new ending. A new narrative world must be forged from their scriptural resources to accommodate a crucified and resurrected Messiah and a God whose coming kingdom is associated with such a one. Luke's use of his familiar journey motif creates the necessary space for the audience to imagine that such a new narrative world is being forged for his characters. In depicting God as "preventing them from recognizing him," Luke portrays God as active in creating the necessary space for this to take place. The risen one uses this space to forge a context in which the eyes of the travelers, once opened, could coherently bring into proper focus a crucified and resurrected Messiah. For the characters in the story, this is the point of their eyes being "prevented from recognizing him," only later to be "opened" by God. Hence, it is only after the characters have had "all the scriptures" reinterpreted/*opened* (διήνοιγεν) for them that their eyes are opened (διηνοίχθησαν) by God to enable them to recognize not only the one walking with them as the crucified and risen one, but also to recognize him as the

<sup>7</sup>On this theme as a whole, see Arthur A. Just, *The Ongoing Feast: Table Fellowship and Eschatology at Emmaus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993) esp. 219-261.

one toward whom the whole of Scripture was moving. This is Luke's way of subtly portraying God as active in finally breaking through their own failure to grasp the new world order being brought about by God's reign. Later I will return to the impact that this way of telling the story has for the audience.

The two travelers return to Jerusalem and rejoin the eleven and the others. While they are in the process of narrating "the things on the road" and how this risen Lord "was made known" to them by God (vv. 33-35), the risen Lord simply stands in their midst, once again fully embodied and followable by the narrative spotlight (v. 36). Before anyone can utter a word, he greets them all with the words of v. 36, "Peace to you" (εἰρήνη ὑμῖν). For those familiar with Israel's Scriptures, these words, coming from the mouth of one who had announced and enacted the coming reign of God in his ministry and had experienced one of its constitutive events (the resurrection from the dead), are more than just an admonition to feel calm or peaceful. On the lips of a resurrected Jew who had been crucified as Messiah, this greeting to those who were hoping for the redemption of Israel is not far from saying, "Your God reigns." The comparison with Isa 52:7 is suggestive:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace (εἰρήνη), who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

This comparison suggests that as the risen Christ stands here in Jerusalem, on Mt. Zion, announcing eschatological peace, he does so as a confirmation and embodiment of both his own words and the words of numerous characters at the beginning of Luke's Gospel. He is indeed the announcer and embodiment of the *salvation* spoken about by Zechariah (1:67-79) and Simeon (2:29-32). His very embodied presence as one *resurrected from the dead* confirms that he is indeed a *bringer of good news* that the reign of God has begun (4:43), that the reversal of the current order of things that Mary's song had anticipated (1:46-55) has commenced. Or in other words, God has indeed begun to reign by completely reclaiming and redeeming for his lordship one specific part of the old order of death and decay, the fleshly body of the one crucified as Messiah.

But the disciples' reaction to Jesus' presence and announcement is anything but peaceful. It is one of terror, because they "kept thinking they were seeing a spirit" (v. 37). Jesus responds by saying, "Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself." Even though Luke never actually says anything about the nail marks in Jesus' hands and feet, the implication here is that looking at the hands and feet of the one before them will confirm his connection with the Jesus who was crucified at the hands of the empire. But Luke's culture had ready-made categories that might encourage the characters to imagine that they were seeing the soul of a *dead* person made up of very light material that continues to bear the image of his earthly body, scars and all.<sup>8</sup> Hence, the sight of Jesus standing there would pre-

<sup>8</sup>Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 48-58.

sumably only confirm his connection with a person who was dead. So Jesus continues, “Handle me and see because a spirit doesn’t have *flesh and bones* as you see that I have” (my translation).<sup>9</sup> He then shows them his crucifixion-marked fleshly hands and feet. Jesus’ risen body is therefore no soul bearing the image of his earthly body, nor, as we have seen, is it simply a resuscitated corpse. As the fleshly body of one who has been raised to life appropriate for the kingdom of God, it is indeed something quite new, something that moves beyond the ready-made categories of Luke’s audience.

Luke concludes his gospel with Jesus leading his followers out to Bethany where he ascends into heaven (vv. 50-53). As he gradually fades from the narrative spotlight our last image is one of a transformed, yet fleshly embodied, human being ascending into heaven. The ascension highlights the crucified and risen one’s exaltation or enthronement in “glory” at God’s right hand. Therefore it graphically portrays the truth about which much of Luke’s narrative has testified, namely, that God has begun the ultimate reversal of the current order. It demonstrates this truth in two ways. First, it isn’t just any human being whom Luke pictures as ascending into the very abode of God. It is one who was subjected to the ultimate humiliation, publicly crucified as a messiah hanging naked on a cross. It is one who was put there by both the Jewish elite and the Romans, to whom the Israelites were currently in bondage. Hence, the ascension of the crucified one dramatically confirms that God has begun the ultimate reversal of both the current social and political order. Second, the ascension of a transformed, yet fleshly embodied, human being begins to reverse the normal assumptions of Luke’s audience about the place of human flesh in the cosmos. It shows that God has even begun the ultimate reversal of a socially constructed cosmological order of things, i.e., where human flesh is perceived to be at the bottom of a cosmological hierarchy and not worthy of being redeemed. It is this fleshly aspect of Luke’s portrait of the risen body of Christ that will occupy us in the next section.

### III. THE COSMOS: REDEMPTION AND RECONCILIATION

Luke’s portrayal of the body of the risen Lord stretches his audience’s imagination by privileging the fleshly human body, albeit in a transformed state, as the vehicle for Jesus’ post-resurrection, transformed, “kingdom” existence. This focus on the flesh would have been at odds with the popular culture of Luke’s day.<sup>10</sup> To clarify this, a brief sketch of some general cultural assumptions regarding life after death and the nature of the universe in Luke’s cultural context will be helpful. As

<sup>9</sup>The verb translated “handle” (ψηλαφάω) in v. 39 implies more than just a light touch with an outstretched finger. It is the same verb used three times in Gen 27 (LXX) when Isaac felt around on Jacob to determine whether or not he was Esau.

<sup>10</sup>Since it is probable that Luke expected his work to circulate widely among churches throughout the Greco-Roman world (see the essays in Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998]), I am purposely painting the historical/cultural background on a large canvas.

we have already seen, in Luke's world the souls of the dead were often portrayed as having a material body, usually made up of very fine, light material, which could even bear the image of earthly scars. But they were not portrayed as having a body composed of the heavy type of fleshly material that makes up the present human body. Among the more educated, familiar with popular Greco-Roman philosophy, this present fleshly body, composed of heavy elements at the bottom of what amounted to a cosmological hierarchy, had no place in the afterlife. This is because the stuff of which it was made was just too gross, thick, and heavy, rather than fine, thin, and light.<sup>11</sup> Luke's audience would have also been familiar with reports of people whose fleshly corpses were resuscitated temporarily, i.e., only to die again later. But encountering a person with a body of "flesh and bones" that behaves the way that Jesus' body does, a body raised permanently to new life fit for the coming reign of God, cannot be construed as merely an encounter with a resuscitated corpse.

Such a portrait of Jesus' risen body would have moved against the grain of the status-oriented cosmological hierarchy of stuff assumed by a fairly educated Greco-Roman audience. In fact it moves in the opposite direction by elevating the status of the very stuff of the cosmos that suffered and died on the shameful cross (the low-status flesh) to the level of what will be redeemed/transformed and made fit for the coming kingdom of God. Hence, the way Luke tells the story would have called for a reorienting of his audience's assumptions about the very nature of the coming kingdom and about the God who acts "in the flesh and for the flesh."<sup>12</sup>

Interesting theological implications begin to emerge if one pushes the implications of Luke's portrait in his cultural milieu further than Luke himself explicitly does. In this cultural milieu, "the human body was not *like* a microcosm; it *was* a microcosm—a small version of the universe at large."<sup>13</sup> Connected with this, it was commonly assumed that "the human body is of a piece with the elements surrounding and pervading it and that the surface of the body is not a sealed boundary."<sup>14</sup> In light of this conceptuality, Luke's portrait of God's raising the very flesh of the risen Lord warrants a corresponding theological claim. That is, by raising the entirety of the body of Jesus, God has redeemed the universe in microcosm. Because Jesus' body was not separate and completely bounded but shared material with the rest of the old order, the redemption of the cosmos as a whole has begun.

This conceptuality of the human body being porous and connected with all types of material substances chourusing around and through it is analogous to current scientifically informed conceptions of the body. We are told that our very flesh is constantly interchanging elements with the rest of the material universe, that "[t]he human body is actually a living crossroad, a midway point between the most

<sup>11</sup>Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 108-120.

<sup>12</sup>This phrase comes from Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia: On the Significance of the Doctrine of the Ascension for Ecclesiology and Christian Cosmology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 13.

<sup>13</sup>Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 16.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

distant galaxies and the most minute subatomic particles.”<sup>15</sup> This conceptuality in contemporary physics also has a time dimension (the space/time continuum). Hence, Luke’s portrait of the body of the risen Lord stretches our own theological imagination, because in our milieu it would force us to make the theological claim that, in raising the entirety of the body of Jesus, God has begun the redemption of all aspects of space and all aspects of time, both past and future. This is because the stuff of Jesus’ body shared a history with the rest of the stuff of the old order, a history stretching back to the Big Bang. It also has a future that stretches into our own present in the bread and wine of the eucharist, our own anticipation of the messianic banquet of God’s consummated reign.

Luke’s focus on the very fleshly, material body of the risen Lord does not mean that there is anything inherent in the material created order that maintains some possibility for life to emerge. It simply means that God remains faithful to his creation, not choosing to start completely over, but redeeming it in its entirety. Since Luke portrays God reclaiming for his reign the entirety of Jesus’ fleshly body, one could say that the body of the risen Lord not only functions as the embodiment of the proclamation that God reigns, but also reveals a microcosmic glimpse of the consummation of that coming reign for the entirety of the cosmos.<sup>16</sup> In the words of David Toolan, the risen body of the Lord is “the fleshing out of the Creator’s dream for the universe,” and indeed, “[i]f he be raised up, it means that all things are raised up.”<sup>17</sup>

I am not suggesting that the physical material of the cosmos is the most important aspect of God’s redemptive action, but only that, in light of Luke’s narrative, it too cannot be excluded from redemption and reclamation for God’s coming reign. Indeed, there is more to the redemption of the cosmos and the human body than the redemption of physical stuff. In the words of Lyle Dabney, “[I]n raising our mortal body, God will redeem not just that body, the locus of our existence, but the entirety of our embodied life: the whole of our relationships, our experiences and our encounters, all that makes up our identity.”<sup>18</sup> This is the direction Luke’s story takes when he narrates the reconciliation in relationships that takes place at the table of the embodied risen Lord, a table at which we gather to experience the real presence of this Lord and anticipate the consummation of his reign when he will redeem and reconcile all our strained relationships.

<sup>15</sup>Mary Timothy Prokes, *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 45.

<sup>16</sup>Although Luke doesn’t explicitly make the resurrection of Christ the model for the future resurrection as does Paul, he moves in this direction in Acts 3:15 (C. H. Talbert, “The Place of the Resurrection in the Theology of Luke,” *Interpretation* 46/1 [1992] 25-26). For a sustained argument that Paul’s rhetoric in 1 Cor 15 does not “spiritualize” either Christ’s resurrection or our own but moves in a similar theological direction as Luke’s language, see my forthcoming articles, “On Removing a Trump Card: Flesh and Blood and the Reign of God,” and “Turning the World Upside Down in 1 Corinthians 15: Apocalyptic Epistemology, the Resurrected Body, and the New Creation.”

<sup>17</sup>David Toolan, *At Home in the Cosmos* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001) 208, 213.

<sup>18</sup>D. Lyle Dabney, “‘Justified by the Spirit’: Soteriological Reflections on the Resurrection,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3/1 (2001) 61-62.

#### IV. AN ACT OF GRACE

That Luke's focus on the fleshly character of the risen Lord raises difficult practical and philosophical problems for us cannot be denied. But it would have raised similar problems for his first audience as well, and his implicit claim in this chapter is that these portraits are being given to his audience through an act of divine grace. As Luke's audience, we were told in the prologue that his orderly narrative was dependent on "those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (1:2). This means that our very hearing of the story in the first place is dependent on the testimony of Jesus' followers such as the two on the road. By portraying God as active in creating the necessary space along the way for these two to experience an act of divine revelation, Luke is subtly informing us that our vantage point is also divinely given. Our own recognition of the crucified Jesus as the resurrected Messiah comes only from God's gracious act of revelation in providing for us a privileged vantage point in the narrative we are reading. Therefore, we ought to acknowledge that our own ability to believe in the resurrection in the first place, especially the way Luke narrates it, does not come from any "natural" persuasive power of the narrative itself. Rather, our ability to believe the scandalous claim that God has begun the reversal of the current order by raising in the flesh a person who was crucified as Messiah comes only as a divine gift, an act of divine hospitality.

In the resurrection, then, God has decisively begun to reverse the old order, overwhelming and transforming it with a completely unexpected act of grace, thereby confirming that God's reign has indeed begun. In light of God's action, we can pray the prayer that Jesus taught us in Luke 11 with confidence. For in praying "Let your kingdom come," we have already been given assurance that it has come and a portrait of what it will look like when it is consummated in the future. When the kingdom comes in its fullness, we will sit down with the risen one in table fellowship at the messianic banquet, our bodies transformed into the same incorruptible flesh as his. Invited to his table by an act of divine hospitality, we will feast together with him and with all who have ever journeyed on the way before, with, and after us. We will hear the risen Lord say, "Peace to you all." We may even dare to hope that at this table of reconciliation, a little ten-year-old girl will sit down beside her seventeen-year-old brother, physical and emotional scars transformed, passing this same "peace" to each other as their mother looks on. Around *that* table we will raise our voices in harmony singing, "Our God Reigns!" ⊕

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