I am in no way a biblical literalist. I don’t believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, which is the view that the Bible contains no errors and cannot be wrong. I think that will surprise precisely no one who has ever heard me preach. I place entirely too much importance on context!

Take, for example, the two stories of the creation in Genesis 1 and 2. Not only do they present two different stories for the creation of humanity, but the order in which species (plants, animals, and humans) are created is different. Or think about the thorny issue of slavery - for hundreds of years, the Bible was used to defend the practice of slavery across the British Empire and in the American South. Now, we interpret these passages differently. We certainly don’t use them to continue to defend slavery.

Or think about the question of women in the church. The Bible itself contains inconsistencies on this subject. There are the women who fund Jesus’ ministry in Luke 8:2-3, to Tabitha and other early church leaders in Acts, and who receive mention in some of Paul’s letters. But then there is the verse about women being silent in the church, which was proof-texted (taken out of context to support a position that the Bible as a whole doesn't support) to keep women out of positions of leadership in the church, unless they were cloistered away as nuns, for a millennium and a half.

Or take the entire book of Leviticus. (More on this in the future.) But, for now, think about the purity laws, both food and dietary. When was the last time you felt the need to ritually purify yourself before coming to church? Unless you happen to be lactose intolerant, when was the last time you went to a Tex-Mex restaurant and asked them to hold the cheese from your tacos or your beef enchiladas? When was the last time you said no to bacon or sausage, because pork is unclean?

The Bible is meant to be interpreted. We can’t HELP but interpret it. Each time we open it, each time we read a passage, we interpret scripture through the lens of our lives, our lived experience of faith, and the history of the church over the last 2000 years.

BUT. It is possible to over-interpret the Bible. To take events that, I believe, are meant to be interpreted as having actually happened and interpret them as metaphors or spiritual experiences. One of these events is Jesus’ resurrection.

Historically, Christians have believed in Jesus’ actual, bodily resurrection from the dead - this is borne out by stories such the one of Thomas placing his hand in Jesus’ wounds, and Jesus eating a meal with the apostles. But more recently, there have been theologians who have argued that Jesus rose from the dead *spiritually*, but not *bodily* - appearing to the apostles as a vision some sort of spiritual manifestation.

I have a problem with this.

I believe - I have always believed - that Jesus was resurrected bodily, physically - not just spiritually. There are a couple of reasons for this.

First, our bodies are no less important than our spirits, and we cannot separate our bodies from our spirits; if they were, and if we could, Jesus’ healing would not have been such a big part of his ministry. And our physical, corporeal selves would not be such a big part of our lives. We would not take such genuine, wholesome, God-given pleasure in our bodies.

Secondly, and just as importantly, if Jesus were resurrected spiritually but not physically, what does that demonstrate to the world about God’s power over death? Bodily resurrection demonstrates that death has been defeated. Spiritual resurrection does not.

And finally, there is the promise that we confess in the Apostles’ Creed:

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

**the resurrection of the body,**

and the life everlasting. Amen.

Or again, in the Nicene Creed:

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father and the Son,

who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,

who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

**We look for the resurrection of the dead,**

and the life of the world to come.

Because we believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, when we look for the resurrection of the dead, we are able to believe that this is not just a spiritual resurrection - not just our angelic, ghostly beings, floating around somewhere in heaven. We are able to believe in the resurrection of the body, and in fact, we confess that we believe in the resurrection of the body!

We have an Easter faith. A faith that promises life after death. True, real, honest-to-goodness life after death, a life in which we rejoice in all that is is good and right and joyful and happy and holy.

Happy Easter, y’all.