

Many years ago, while I was working on my undergraduate degree, I tended bar around the Seattle area. I worked in bars that drew from the amazing variety of people who live and work on Capitol Hill, and I worked in bars that saw a substantial number of commercial fishermen in Ballard. My last bar-tending gig was at the Garden Court in the Olympic Hotel downtown and it was there that I encountered a certain kind of loneliness; the loneliness of the business traveler.

Up until then, most of the people I had served were in their hometowns. Some came in fresh from the sea, but most were at least in familiar and in usually friendly surroundings. Their situations and needs were different than those of the road warriors who sat at the bar in the hotel. Nearly all of the men and women I met there were away from home, sometimes for long periods of time. Most of them I saw only once and so there was little reason to develop any kind of relationship. They were strangers in an unfamiliar place. What they seemed to appreciate most were experiences of connection, grounding; experiences that I could most often initiate with an offer of something to eat.

It's remarkable how quickly and reliably a small bowl of nuts or berries or a warm chocolate chip cookie made those strangers into people. There is just something deep, even primal, at the heart of sharing food with another person. Something essential that humanizes and gives life.

At the hotel, sliding a small silver bowl with some kind of nosh in front of a guest opened the door for the stranger who to me was no more than the "Chardonnay at the end of the bar" to become a person: Marisol, the sales director for a retirement community in Dallas. The "dry martini" sitting a couple of stools down from her could come to life as Allen, professor emeritus of English from Louisiana, visiting one of his daughters. The "single-malt with a water back" sitting by himself at the other end of the

bar could reveal himself as Derek, the Scottish bass player waiting for the rest of his bandmates. Strangers who were only categories before—nothing more than surfaces to me—became people. Real people with histories, relationships and perspectives.

Standing among his stunned disciples, Jesus must have recognized that he was now an unknown, a set of surfaces to them; no longer recognizable as the human they once knew, though possibly some ghostly version. And so Jesus did something to help them begin to understand. Jesus opened their minds with the simple, life-giving and humanizing act of sharing food.

Jesus had appeared in his risen form to group of disciples who had heard the stories of the women who found the tomb empty. The same disciples who had also heard the story of Jesus appearing to two people walking to Emmaus. Those two did not recognize Jesus in conversation with them either, until they shared bread that he had blessed and broken with them.

And now Jesus himself was standing among the disciples; the Risen Christ offering them peace, and telling them to touch and see the evidence of his crucifixion. But still they are afraid. Christ is, of course, *not* some disembodied spirit, but simply talking to the startled disciples does not help. So Jesus asks them for something to eat and then eats broiled fish in their presence.

At that moment, the Risen Christ is made real, grounded in their earthly experience, not as some other-worldly spirit, but embodied as a story come to life. The resurrection life, as a friend of mine once said, is life that flows out of and continues the self-giving life that Jesus lived on earth—a life lived here and now with lavish and sometimes foolish love, a life of inexhaustible welcome, a life of meals not only with those we would *choose* to call our own but with those whom God has given us to *become* our own.

We don't often talk about the resurrection life that way, do we? Some people talk about resurrection as though it was a prize for those that held the right "Get out of

hell free” card. Others talk about resurrection as though death was nothing more than a passageway from a lower form of being to a higher form of being. Both these explanations diminish the meaning and value of life. Both leave us with no reason to care about those who do not experience life in the same way that we do, no reason to worry about our environment or about justice. And both are actually quite unfaithful to scripture.

Luke’s Gospel is full of reversals. In today’s reading, for example, we encounter the Risen Christ with the disciples not as some heavenly spirit, but *here*, present, and turning the tables: the one who once fed others, now asking to be fed. The resurrected Jesus is not some disembodied entity imparting knowledge from a heavenly afterlife. The resurrected Jesus in Luke opens the disciples understanding of scripture by eating fish with them.

There really isn’t an English translation of the Greek that captures the magnitude of the shift that Jesus created. We could rightly say: “Jesus *blew open* their understanding to understand the Writings.” Because Jesus did not just give them some new information to pour into their existing perspectives. Jesus gave them a whole new way of being. Jesus gave them a liberating experience of the living scripture—an embodied understanding of the resurrection life that increased the value of all life. Jesus brought them into a perspective that treasures all life because where there is life, there is God. Incarnation is not negated by death, but enriched by the resurrection.

We, too, are witnesses of these things. The Risen Christ stands among us saying “Peace be with you” as more than just a spiritual notion. We have the opportunity at this table to share the Real Presence of the Risen Christ made manifest among us. The Real Presence of the Risen Christ in the bread and the cup joins “that Republican” and “that liberal” and “that black teenager” and “that straight woman” and every other surface description we can think of—brings us all in relationship; brought together as real humans with all our flaws and all our gifts; our shortcomings and our magnificence.

Within those relationships and surrounding those real human relationships the Risen Christ *blows open* our understanding of the meaning of the resurrection, which is this: that we can live *beyond* what we believe to be our limitations into greater possibilities; that liberation, especially liberation from sin, is available to all; and that those who allow themselves to be found by Christ are our brothers and sisters who are more than categories: “the poor, the outcast and the friendless”.

The Risen Christ is present to *all* people so if we share our understanding of the meaning of the resurrection, if we share the simple meal of the bread and cup, then strangers *in categories* become brothers and sisters *in Christ*—real people with real flesh and blood. And as we share the live-giving, humanizing bread and cup with each other, we come to see and from time to time may even be startled by the Risen Christ in those whom God gathers at this table.

If you have not experienced the Risen Christ, let Christ come and find you because, I promise you, the search is underway. Whether we have experienced the Risen Christ or not, we can practice offering God’s loving peace to others until we see it pass through us. To proclaim the Gospel is simply to *live* it—to live your life embodied, with all that embodiment entails, but live it with your heart open in prayer and in the expectation that God will manifest the resurrection life in you. Opening our hearts and minds in prayer and expectation prepares us to receive God’s self-giving resurrection life. It is, after all, God’s desire to fill our hearts and minds and bodies to overflowing as vessels of holy and boundless life and love for all creation.

Let me leave you with an insight from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor who was arrested and imprisoned for his role in an attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler. In one of his letters from prison, dated just a year before his execution, Bonhoeffer wrote this:

“We pay more attention to dying than to death. We’re more concerned to get over the act of dying than to overcome death. Socrates mastered the art of dying;

Christ overcame death as the last enemy. There is a real difference between the two things. The one is within human capacity, the other means resurrection. It's not from the art of dying, but from the resurrection of Christ that a new and purifying wind can blow through our present world. Here is the answer to Archimedes' challenge: 'Give me somewhere to stand, and I will move the earth.' If only a few people really believed that and acted upon it in their daily lives, a great deal would be changed. To live in the light of the resurrection—that is the meaning of Easter.¹”

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. New York: Macmillan, 1972.