

Third Sunday of Easter  
Wicker Park Lutheran Church  
Rev. Jason Glombicki  
April 15, 2018

In today's gospel, the word "understand" grabbed my attention. Understanding is not mere knowledge, it doesn't simply come with power, and, frankly, it's not that pervasive. As one author puts it, understanding requires an "ability to think and act flexibly with what one knows."<sup>1</sup> In today's episode, we saw the process of understanding unfold.

Just before the episode began, two disciples were telling the other disciples that they saw Jesus while eating with a stranger. Then, the first thing that happened in today's reading was that the embodied Jesus frightened the disciples. In response, Jesus gave them a greeting of peace. Then, Jesus used the disciple's senses to calm their fears by commanding them to look, telling them to touch, and allowing them to witness him eating. Finally, after Jesus mitigated their fears and confusion then, and only then, Jesus opened them to understanding.

I wish that humanity could embrace Jesus's process of bringing understanding. I think that far too often we want to shove knowledge in people's faces to force understanding. We spend time waiting to respond instead of truly listening to another. We quickly jump to console instead of holding space in the pain and fear of another.

Yet, in today's scene, Jesus began by meeting the disciples where they were, namely in a place of confusion and fear. Jesus engaged with what they held in common. He talked to them about familiar viewpoints – like Moses, the prophets, and the psalms. He engaged with them

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.learner.org/workshops/socialstudies/pdf/session1/1.WhatIsUnderstanding.pdf>

around shared human needs – like food, relationality, and security. Then, after rooting their relationships in the things he knew they held common, he opened their minds to something new.

This, my friends, is a Biblical model for transformation and understanding that is not always embraced. I've been part of religious organizations that forget to start with the basics. These groups jump into talking about the Bible from the first moment. They try to change people's minds and transform their lives before knowing anything about them. At its basic level, their approach is a form of colonialism. Their technique is to take over the individual by controlling their thoughts and beliefs.

Yet, Jesus gave us a model of accompaniment. God modeled how to respond by first engaging with individuals as humans – that is by eating with them, connecting with them, and talking with them – then, and only then, can transformation begin. Not only does today's gospel give us a glimpse of the Biblical process of transformation or, to put it another way, the process of “on-going” resurrection, but it also shows what it looks like to experience resurrection.

You see, for the disciples to understand the scriptures they needed an open-mind. Openness was a prerequisite for understanding. Understanding, then, brought about resurrection. So, openness brought understanding, and understanding brought resurrection. With that in mind, I wonder if we are open? How often do we walk into situations with an open-mind willing to listen and engage? How often do we come here ready to be changed? More often than not, I think we come here thinking we already know God and Jesus. We come with preconceived notions about God that are harmful, damaging, and destroying the church and our world. We've let television, movies, and pop culture create our inflexible belief structure, so that by the time we get here we are so close-minded that resurrection is the furthest thing from possible.

One of the common ways we've closed ourselves off to transformation is by taking a metaphor and literalizing it. As church leaders and theologians, we've let it happen to the term "resurrection" and, in some cases, we've endorsed an Easter lie. As the theologian Gail Ramshaw puts it, "Probably because language of resurrection is so central to Christian faith, and because people want to escape the finality of death, the imagery [of resurrection] has consistently been literalized."<sup>2</sup>

One way for us to better understand that the resurrection is an image, rather than a fact, is by looking at the wide range of Biblical examples of resurrection. We experienced one example today during Matthew's baptism. For, in baptism we are buried with Christ and we rise with Christ. It's a resurrection because it's the moment when we realize that as God's children we don't need to fear what the world throws our way; rather, we are reminded that we are loved and, therefore, we are liberated to love. So too at our Easter Vigil we explored our ancestors' stories of resurrection. We saw how God raised people out of death during creation and the exodus of the Israelites. We celebrated new life that walked out of the chaos of the flood and the drama of the fiery furnace. The stories of resurrection continued with Lady Wisdom, Jonah, Miriam, Mary Magdalene, and they live on in our lives as we continually seek, find, and experience resurrection. You see, resurrection was not a once and done moment; rather, resurrection has happened, is happening, and will continue to happen.

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<sup>2</sup> Ramshaw, Gail. *Treasures Old and New*. "Resurrection of the Body." p 333-342.

These statements about literalizing resurrection might lead to questions about Jesus's bodily resurrection. So, could today's episode be about Jesus literally appearing? Sure. Could it instead be about the animating and embodied presence of Jesus found in and among the disciples – you know, much like a person “channeling” the essence of a loved one in their absence? Sure. As people of faith, we ponder these questions. However, the resurrection is so much more than that first Easter morning. We know that resurrection is among us, around us, and in us; resurrection is a mysterious thing, and resurrection is a continuously developing image.

On this day, we come to be transformed by our God with gifts of water, bread, and wine. We don't come to explain, rather we come to experience. As we gather at the table, we become the body of Christ by saying to one another, “peace be with you.” For, in this place, resurrection is experienced in the mending of relationships, it is discovered in the realization that we are fallible, and it is known in the acknowledgement that we will surely die. Yet, in our deaths, we live on. For we die in Christ, and so too we live in Christ. Thanks be to God for this gift of resurrection. Amen.