

1) Indulge me—humor me, will you?—Join me in an Imaginative Exercise of Role Identification.

It may stretch imagination slightly—but we’re an adventurous bunch—let’s give it a shot.

Imagine that you are . . . Jesus . . . the Risen Christ, to be specific.

It’s been one long, hard Resurrection Day—has it not?

The wake-up call came very early and very insistently—no snooze alarm in reach.

And you’ve been going nonstop ever since—

trying your best to get your resurrection recognized.

But all your earnest efforts notwithstanding, your success has been mixed, to say the least.

Fully aware of the predictable and considerable shock effect it might have;

you elected not to show yourself in the act of bursting forth from your stone-sealed tomb.

You mitigated that mind-blowing impact by leaving an announcement at the tomb to—

an angel with an attitude, two men in dazzling clothes, and/or a young man with a white robe.

These announcements have produced responses ranging

from the wordless terror of fleeing women to drop-dead fainting by Roman tomb guards.

It is women who first see and hear that the tomb is empty, and that you are risen.

Their reports get patronizingly discounted by the men—surprise, surprise.

But the news, at least is leaking out: That you’re not in the tomb where you belong.

Peter makes a quick graveside check—YUP, NO BODY THERE—WOW;

but then he just goes home.

So you, Jesus, the Risen Christ, follow up with a series of personal appearances.

That’s NOT as easy an undertaking as it sounds—Question 1: How to make your entry?

Knock on the doors behind which your disciples are puzzling, crouching, quivering?

That’s no good—they’ll figure it’s the authorities coming after THEM like they did for YOU.

Just show up alongside them and say *PEACE!*—That could well freak them out even further.

Remembering how they treated you just three days ago—and how mad you’d surely be—

they might just figure that their chances of survival were better facing Roman soldiers.

In short, a “sudden appearance” strategy is problematic every which way.

So—how about a different Easter tactic—join disciples incognito on an afternoon hike—

do pastoral care with them in their grief by engaging them in deep theological discussion

as they travel the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

But then what do you do, if, after your explanation, they still don’t make the connection?

In short—if you’re the Risen Lord, you’ve got a problem.

Your resurrection has, by itself, seemingly accomplished nothing.

You want to lead your followers into Resurrection Life—
into the practice of serious PEACE making—BUT you've got your work cut out for you—
this will require all the patience and imagination that your Risen Life can muster.

2) OK—Here endeth the Imagination Exercise in Role Identification.

I don't want to try YOUR patience—to say nothing of HIS patience—
or that of Biblical scholars who might well LOSE patience with my squeezing together
four very different resurrection stories by four different Gospel sermon writers,
who are preaching to four very different communities.

The issue we've been visually, viscerally exploring, however, is clear; and it comes down to this:

In our traditional imagination defaults,
the message of Easter can easily be heard as a fanfare—
as the blare and boom of trumpets and drums.

But the sound of resurrection is actually much better played

by an extended, sweeping, tension-charged melody line intoned by violins and oboes.

So—back to the question: How DOES Jesus, in fact, play out the process for His disciples—
a process that involves not just RECOGNIZING, but REALIZING life in the resurrection?

Today our Easter-announcing preacher is Saint Luke—so let's just go with how he tells it.

3) Luke is nothing if not clear about the fact that, not surprisingly,
it takes a long, long time for the reality of resurrection to “sink in.”

When Jesus appears to the disciples, in the account that we just heard, He does so after:

- 1) Having His rising announced to the women.
- 2) Having His rising at least partially confirmed by Peter's visit to the empty tomb.
- 3) Having HIMSELF led an hours-long resurrection conversation
with two disciples on that Sunday afternoon walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus—and
- 4) Having THAT encounter—along with ANOTHER appearance to Simon Peter—
both ANNOUNCED TO and CONFIRMED BY the eleven disciples.

And even after all of that, they are still freaked out when He turns up to bring them PEACE.

So—Jesus tries yet again—*Touch me! Feel my flesh and bone—my hands and feet!*

Yet—again—that doesn't work—and Luke then tells us something fascinating—

That (quote) *in their joy, they were disbelieving and STILL wondering.*

THAT doesn't make any sense, does it? Sure it does!

Have you ever, after a desperate loss, been upended
with a reversal that was (quote) *too good to be true?*

- 4) It's like this, you see: Touching flesh and bone might well convince the disciples that what stood before them was no ghost.
But not just any old Certified Non-Ghost would count for much, now would it?
A warm body?—So what!—There's lots of those around.
And as for their presumably dead friend's distinctly recognizable facial features—
you wouldn't need to be a Century Twenty-One person to know that—
under stress—in the presence of the totally unexpected—the mind can play cruel tricks.
Poor Resurrected Jesus!
At THIS point, I'd be at my wits end if I were the Risen Christ.
(Fortunately for all of us, I'm not.)
But Jesus has, apparently, yet another resurrection revelation strategy up His sleeve.
Got anything to eat, guys? he asks—They do—So He chows down on broiled fish.
What difference—in heaven's name—does THAT make? All the difference in the world.
Because, in Luke's telling of the Jesus Story, time and time and time again,
Jesus sits down to eat with friends and strangers—even foes.
He sits and eats with highbrows and lowbrows—good and bad.
Eating with others: it's a tangible, signature gesture of His very being—
welcoming anyone and everyone,
and allowing Himself to BE welcomed BY anyone and everyone.
For fearful, joyful followers,
that real-life gesture signifies and validates His real-life resurrection.
It is an embodied symbol for those eleven disciples in that room—
a fleshed out “for instance” of what Jesus' life HAS been—and now IS—beyond all imagining.
- 5) The interesting thing, however, is this:
necessary though this fish-eating, food-sharing symbolism may be, it's not sufficient—
The symbol IS essential—but so is an understanding of the SIGNIFICANCE of that symbol.
So Jesus launches into an explanation of that significance.
With the sharing-food-with-friends symbol now firmly in place,
Jesus proceeds to connect the dots—putting His resurrection in the context
of God's ongoing action since the dawn of time—
Resurrection as music fresh and new for Easter Day,
and resurrection as the same strong song
that God has played across the whole of human history—Israel's in particular.
Finally—finally—finally—it begins to dawn on the disciples:
Resurrection is the music God ALWAYS plays, and just will not quit playing.
Rising to life from a tomb left empty is one fleshed-out symbol of that once and future fact.
And His eating with the disciples is a FURTHER enacted symbol of that resurrection—
A once and future fact disciples themselves will now play out
in THEIR own role identification with HIM.
YOU are witnesses of THESE things, Jesus tells them—So go show what you see.

- 6) **Symbol and significance—back and forth—Luke interplays the two—**
not just in this scene, but in the one just before it; where the significance of resurrection history
is explained by the unrecognized Risen Lord as he walks through it, step-by-step,
with two devastated, disoriented disciples on the road to Emmaus.
Significance is necessary, but it is not sufficient—
those two disciples still don't get it by journey's end.
So Jesus accepts their invitation (guess where?) to supper.
He breaks the bread—He enacts LIVE the symbol of their connection.
And, for these two, at this time and place—the reality of resurrection finally comes alive.
- 7) **Symbol and significance—back and forth—**
Luke interplays those two yet again in the story from Acts we also heard today.
Peter and John are in the temple. They come upon a crippled man who asks for money.
Peter and John have none of that, but they've got something better.
Through the power of the Risen Lord, THEY offer a tangible symbol OF that resurrection
by raising the lame man into a leaping, singing, joyful, God-praising resurrection dance.
And then, when those who see it want to know what on earth this all might mean,
Peter preaches a "What's the significance of resurrection?" sermon.
He pulls no punches—He states the facts—Jesus was unjustly executed by mob rule.
Yet Peter does NOT condemn them—he too, after all, is an "Israelite" who denied his Lord.
Then Peter announces that God will not be deterred from singing and dancing resurrection
by any obstructing, death-dealing strategy undertaken
by any tragically misguided people anytime, anywhere.
If God can bring Jesus to life again, Peter tells his resurrection-hungry listeners,
God can release us—each and every one—from the vicious cycle of the death of sin.
- 8) **No wonder the early church thrived and prospered, once resurrection had "sunk in."**
No wonder that, when we engage in the same patient, persistent interplay of our Risen Lord:
tangible, life-giving symbol sharing—
touching people where they are, in ways they deeply need and can readily recognize—
that symbol sharing—
interplayed with thoughtful, significance explaining Gospel-story telling—
that interplay of sharing symbol and significance—
it activates and extends God's resurrection PEACE.
When symbol and significance show forth in what we say and do;
the power of Christ's resurrection is released—in us, for us, though us—
as we practice resurrection. And so the inviting question:
How DO we—CAN we—MIGHT we—WILL we—
join in symbolic and significant witness to God's resurrection song?

For us, this IS, in fact an act of Imaginative Role Identification—but one that's not imaginary.

Because, as members of the Body of The Risen Christ—as a community—

This is our way of envisioning, understanding, embodying, and enacting

God's once and future Easter Story. THE LORD IS RISEN—IN DEED.

What might that look like, sound like on the ground—in your life, my life, our common life?

IMAGINE THAT!