

Easter 3 Year B

**This is the day the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it. *AMEN***

How do YOU know what you know? How did the disciples know who Jesus was? What persuaded them? Are they different from us? Of course, they were there and we are here and now. While they weren't different from us in ways to apprehend, they were actually present for some of the ministry of Jesus, and they had real, living experiences of him.

On Easter morning, although the accounts vary, people didn't recognize Jesus. That's always been a curiosity for me. One account at the tomb has an angel, while in another the women thought the person they saw was the gardener. People at the tomb were told that Jesus had risen, and that they would see him in Galilee. When he came to where the disciples were meeting they did recognize him, and it was reported that he also made many other recognizable appearances.

When Mary saw him in the garden she didn't know him by sight. It was only when she heard him talking to her directly, that she saw who it was. She responded to hearing him call her by name by knowing that he was indeed the person she knew, he was Jesus, he was risen from the dead, he was alive, but she wasn't allowed to touch him.

Then the Sunday after Easter, the text is always the story of Thomas, and his not accepting what the other disciples had told him, that they had "seen the Lord." They reported to him that they had seen the Lord, and Mary would have added that she had heard him as well. Thomas held out for touching him. Jesus had told Mary not to touch him yet, because it wasn't time, but Thomas wanted to touch Jesus. The encounter in that upper room with the disciples and Thomas has a kind of "show me, I'm from Missouri" pugnacity. Since Jesus permitted, or even allowed, or encouraged Thomas to feel his side, hands, and feet, the meeting resounds

through the ages as having been more than OK, Jesus wanted that checking, that verification for both Thomas and posterity. The account before today's Gospel is the road to Emmaus narrative. Friends of Jesus had been going towards that town, one so small and unimportant that scholars have not really ever identified where it was. They were talking about the events that had happened, and they were disheartened by the end of their hopes in Jesus and his shameful death. An unfamiliar person began to walk along with them, and they were so cheered by his presence that they urged him to stay while they ate their supper. He told them of their own memories, and then this: "In the breaking of the bread, they knew it was the Lord." If seeing, hearing, and touching Jesus had been demonstrated, maybe this all could be called experiencing Jesus.

Then comes this morning's Gospel. It recaps seeing, touching, and hearing Jesus in as ordinary ways as could happen, and then they eat together. In the Emmaus narrative the emphasis is on an almost ceremonial breaking of bread, a liturgical formulation. That description has been used as one of the prefiguring images for using the breaking of bread together as the communal and ceremonial—or liturgical—way to know the Lord, to engage with Jesus as a living, real presence who is reciprocally with those that share bread with him.

This morning's Gospel has a different flavor. Here Jesus asks his friends, "Have you anything to eat?" That is not an expected question from either a ghost or a dead person. If Jesus was hungry he was really alive. More than acting in a dramatic pattern of breaking bread, this question is a regular human question. The account continues, "They gave him a piece of broiled fish." (Let's pause for a moment to consider food around deaths. We talk about funeral "baked meats." We go to funerals and memorial services, and we are offered bland food, finger foods, and perhaps bits of baked ham or turkey. It's food that has often been cooked elsewhere and is for nibbling and keeping up our spirits. I don't think of any aroma of cooking connected with funeral "baked

meats”. Much of the food comes from neighbors and friends, or in this day and age, from caterers. The affected people are relieved from actual cooking, but their friends want to keep up the most bereaved people’s strength and energies, and the family of the person who has died wants to be hospitable to the people who come to comfort and condole. Eating together reminds people of a normal activity that seems difficult in the circumstance that brings them together: someone important to each in the gathered group has died. People gather both to make real the death to all, but also to be together and tell stories and to remember. They all need their energies to figure out what is next, and to understand what the particular death means for the group and the individuals. [An observation—the worst thing about funeral home viewings and even funeral home funerals, is the absence of food and drink. A real Irish wake was characterized by food and drink, if not too much drink, and was often seen as raucous and out of control. People surely told stories and even became maudlin in their grief, and emotions were aired.] Instead, there are all kinds of laws and ordinances that keep funeral homes clean and safe—and I would guess by intention—well controlled, and about presenting the dead with honor and distance from those who come, distant from the living people’s lives and feelings. Some sort of eating gathering has to happen in a different place, separated or even remote from the person who’s died.)

In today’s Gospel, Jesus asks for something to eat. His friends give him broiled (that is smelly, fresh cooked, immediate, local, real, solid, food for working) fish. Broiled fish is as opposite food from funeral baked meats as I can think of. It’s ordinary, real, and for the disciples, cheap and not special, and has a warm and rich aroma. It’s not possible to provide immediate fresh broiled fish, hermetically sealed from any reality of smell and cooking. Jesus took it and ate it. Can you imagine a funeral caterer cooking broiled kippers or trout to serve to the people gathering around a person who has died? It’s a funny picture, especially if you have an imagination about smells. Broiled fish is a healthy smell compared

to the aroma either of someone recently dead, or the sickly smell of too many flowers that have been sitting around for several days. Broiled fish sets this encounter with Jesus as clearly in the land of the living as is possible. The setting smells healthy, and Jesus eats the hot, tasty, broiled meal. They don't offer him chicken broth, or simple bread. They don't offer him dried bits of meat or some dates or figs. Broiled fish is neither traveling food, nor sick-person food. It's healthy food, and food to go to work on.

Here the Gospel writer adds smelling to the image of Jesus as alive, and not the warning smell that had been suggested about Lazarus. Remember, people warned Jesus not to go into the tomb of Lazarus for it had been more than three days since Lazarus had died and they knew there would be a smell from him. Jesus had been "dead" presumably for more than three or four days, and any smell should have been around his being dead. Instead the Gospel writer presents a healthy Jesus eating smelly fast and immediately cooked strong tasting food; it's food for life, food for the living. (I am deeply grateful to the mothers of the ancient church for not settling on broiled fish as the common meal to celebrate the living, real presence of Jesus with them to feed and strengthen the followers of Jesus to carry out his work. How that conversation went is shrouded in silence, but someone must have said, "You can't get fresh enough fish everywhere, and it just won't work—stick to bread and wine; we can carry that, and it won't go bad, and it won't smell us all up for the week.") On the other hand, had broiled fish been adopted as the communion meal, we'd all have been a little less theoretical, a little less symbolic about that meal. It might have been easier to remember that the meal we share together is one to experience the presence of Jesus with us, and us with him, but that the meal was mainly to get us back to the road, back to work to bring about the realm of God's love to all and for all. As funeral homes help separate us from death, grieving, reality, life, only providing well deployed boxes of Kleenex, as a nod to the sadness of the occasion, so the form of this Eucharistic meal,

with wafers and this sort of strong sipping wine, separates us from food, and stoking up for work.

Seeing, hearing, touching, and sharing in healthy aromas and eating, all describe the disciples' and other peoples around 's experience and knowing that Jesus was alive. Of course he went on to remind them of what he'd said, and what he said the scriptures has said would be true of him. He greeted them with and assuring them of "Peace." You are witnesses of these things." You too are witnesses of seeing, hearing, touching, and sharing living food with Jesus. You too are witnesses, and that's Good News."

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