

### *John 21:1-14 (NIV)*

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: <sup>2</sup>Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup>"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

<sup>4</sup>Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

<sup>5</sup>He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

<sup>6</sup>He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

<sup>7</sup>Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. <sup>8</sup>The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. <sup>9</sup>When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

<sup>10</sup>Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." <sup>11</sup>So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup>Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup>Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup>This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

### *1 Corinthians 15:12-23 (NIV)*

<sup>12</sup>But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup>If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. <sup>14</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. <sup>15</sup>More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup>For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>17</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup>Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. <sup>19</sup>If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

<sup>20</sup>But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup>For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. <sup>23</sup>But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

*Much is made of Jesus' last supper with his disciples before his death. But of little mention is his first breakfast with them after his resurrection.*

So just what exactly do we make of Jesus' resurrection? What do the disciples make of it in the weeks after Jesus' crucifixion and death?

Was he resuscitated like Lazarus, and thus, would return to his old life, grow old, and then die a second time? No, Jesus is going to return to the Father; he told Mary Magdalene exactly that. Whatever that means, it surely isn't just going back to things as they were.

Ok, then, is he a ghost, a spirit of some kind? No, the Greeks had a word for that, *phantasma*, and it is never used in regard to the resurrected Jesus. Sure, the disciples had thought they were seeing a ghost, a *phantasma*, when they saw Jesus walking across the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:26), but they were wrong. He wasn't a ghost and then, and he isn't a ghost now that he has been resurrected.

Now, on this particular morning in the weeks after Jesus' resurrection, Peter and some of the others head out for some morning fishing. After a while, they hear someone calling to them from the shore, telling them to try dropping their net on the right side of the boat. Figuring they have nothing to lose, they do so. At that moment, Peter realizes that Jesus is the man on the shore, so he put his clothes on (fishermen then often fished naked if the weather was good), dove into the water and swam to shore. Meanwhile, the others pulled the net into the boat. It was teeming with fish, 153<sup>1</sup> in all, a miraculous catch by any measure.

When Peter gets to shore, Jesus is waiting. He is no ghost. He is no spirit. He has flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). He is a resurrected Jesus, but Jesus just the same.

And as he always had, Jesus still provides for their needs. Yes, Jesus enables them to get a big haul of fish, but when they come ashore they find that Jesus doesn't need their fish, he has already had some fish cooking over an open fire.

### How important is it that we believe in not only Jesus' resurrection, but our own?

In his *Interpretation* series commentary on 1 Corinthians 15, Richard Hays reflects on the Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead, i.e., that not only has Jesus been resurrected, but that we too shall be resurrected just as Jesus was. (A copy of his commentary on 1 Corinthians is in the St. Andrew library.)

*All Christian proclamation must be grounded in the resurrection.* The faith stands or falls with this, as Paul insists throughout the chapter [1 Corinthians 15]. This has several crucial implications.

First, it means above all else that the gospel is a word of radical grace, for resurrection is one thing that we can neither produce nor control nor manipulate: our hope is exclusively in God's hands.

Second, it means that the faith is based on a particular event in human history, to which a definite circle of people gave testimony; the resurrection is not simply a symbol for the flowers coming up every spring or for the hope that springs eternal in the human heart. The Christian faith is grounded in the rising from the grave of Jesus Christ, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.

Third, the foundational character of the resurrection means that eschatology is at the heart of the gospel. Because Christ is the first fruits, his resurrection points to the resurrection of all those who belong to him. That remains inescapably a future event. Thus, the effect of the resurrection of Christ is to turn our eyes to God's coming future.

Fourth, if we deny the resurrection, we will find ourselves turning inward and focusing on our own religious experience as the matter of central interest. That is what some of the Corinthians were doing, and it has also been the besetting temptation of Protestant theology since Schleiermacher. This inward turn can take the form of pietistic religion interested only in soul-saving, or it can take the form of "New Age" religion interested only in cultivating personal "spirituality." Either way it comes to much the same thing. The gospel of the resurrection of the dead, by contrast, forces us to take seriously that God is committed to the creation and that God has acted and will act in ways beyond our experience and external to our subjectivity.

And they all sit down to share this meal together. Though John doesn't tell us explicitly that Jesus ate fish, we know from Luke's account that Jesus ate fish in front of the disciples on the first night he came to them after his resurrection. He ate the fish that night to help them see that he was still flesh and bone (Luke 24:36-43). Perhaps not exactly the same sort of flesh and bone, but still "flesh and bone," walking, talking, touching, and eating.

I'd bet that Jesus shares the meal with his disciples that morning. He had shared all their previous meals. You might wonder whether Jesus needs to eat to sustain his resurrected

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<sup>1</sup> Much ink has been spilled over the centuries offering various explanations for the "153." Some think it must have some numerological meaning. For me, John says "153" because that is how many fish were caught in the net and John was there to see it. There is no real point in trying to read more into it. It is a miraculous catch. Enough said.

body, as you and I eat to sustain ours. Beats me. Perhaps Jesus eats now, not to sustain himself or because he needs to, but because he wants to enjoy the full bounty of God's goodness, including God's creation. (I take this as evidence that in the fullness of the kingdom of God, I'll be able to enjoy all the food I like without gaining weight.)

We picture the scene with our mind's eye, the bread and fish being passed around the fire, one disciple to another. We can't help but remember the time when Jesus fed thousands

**"So that you may believe . . ."**

John's gospel is the only one that tells us its explicit purpose – that the reader may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and, therefore, may have life in Jesus' name (20:30-31).

From end to end, this gospel is about believing, placing one's faith in Jesus as Lord and God. Then, and now, each person, man and woman, is asked, "Will you believe?"

In the gospel, one comes to believe in two seemingly contradictory ways. First, when Nicodemus comes to see Jesus in the night, Jesus uses the "language of faith, which implies a meaningful human decision to believe in Jesus, a decision that expresses one's conviction and moral intent . . . [there is] no fence straddling, one is in or out."<sup>1</sup> (see 3:16-21).

Yet, on the other hand, Jesus also uses the language of being born a second time, or better, born from above (3:1-10). A baby does not participate in its birth. Life is God's gift to the baby. In the same way, faith is a gift.

We often struggle with these seeming contradictions. We tend to insist that it must be an "either/or," in which faith results from either our free choice or God's gift. Yet, the Christian proclamation is grounded in true, but admittedly, challenging "ands." Our decision to believe is genuine and freely made, *and* it is a gift from God. Here's a couple more of the foundational "ands." Jesus is fully God *and* fully human. Not sometimes one and sometimes the other. Not half-and-half. Fully God *and* fully human. God is one, yet three. A unity of one *and* a community of three. One inherently relational God. How such things can be are beyond our reckoning. But our ability to understand something is not the measure of its truth.

1. D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

with a few loaves and fishes. Now, he feeds only a few. There is nothing miraculous or even remarkable about this meal, except for the fact that it was prepared by one who lay dead only a few weeks before.

*But what if it isn't true?*

This is the question on the lips of the recently founded Christian community in Corinth, Greece. Does it really matter whether Jesus was resurrected? Couldn't we still follow his example of selfless love to build a better world? After all, this whole resurrection business just seems so, in a word, wacky. The dead stay dead; everyone knows that. Can't we just strive to live in peace and love as we seek a mystical union with the divine spark within each of us?

Realizing that the Corinthians are failing to grasp the significance of what he had taught them, the apostle Paul spells it out for them.

Jesus appeared to more than 500 people, many of whom are still living. Go ask them whether this claim of resurrection is the truth or not. And, he goes on to write, understand this. If it is not true, if Jesus wasn't really resurrected and, instead, lies dead somewhere, then . . . "our preaching is useless and so is your faith . . . if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins . . . if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied."

"Pitied" is a strong word. But if Christ is not risen, then, indeed, all Christians are to be pitied because we've believed a lie. And I certainly have no interest in basing my life on lie and I'd bet you don't either.

The Christian faith stands or falls on the truthfulness of the claim that Jesus was resurrected. Not resuscitated. Not some sort of spirit or ghost. Not a hallucination. But truly, bodily resurrected . . . even eating breakfast.

Paul makes his own claim quite clear, the claim Christians have affirmed for 2,000 years:

<sup>20</sup> But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

## Us Too: We are the “second fruits” of 1 Cor. 15:23

Paul can hardly believe what he hears from the Corinthians. Deny Jesus’ resurrection!? In response, he lists witnesses who can testify to the truth of the claim. There are nearly 500 and most are still living, Paul writes. And, he goes on, if Jesus wasn’t bodily resurrected then Christianity is one big lie and the believers, all those who placed their faith in Jesus, are to be pitied. “If Christ has not been raised,” Paul writes, “your faith is futile and you are still in your sins . . . if for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Corinthians 15:17-19).

But there’s more. If Jesus wasn’t resurrected, then we won’t be resurrected ourselves. Thankfully, however, as Paul writes, “the truth is that Christ has been raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries . . . Everybody dies in Adam; everybody comes alive in Christ. But we have to wait our turn: Christ is first, then those with him at his Coming” (from *The Message*). To translate it more literally, Jesus Christ is “the first fruits of the those who have died.” Jesus is the first to be resurrected, then when he returns, the rest of us will be resurrected too! THE REST OF US??!!

Yes, simply put, the creedal affirmation, “the resurrection of the body,” is not about Jesus’ resurrection, which we affirm earlier in the creed, it is about our own bodies. As Jesus was raised so shall we all be raised! Paul puts it this way in his letter to the Romans, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11).

The Jews of Jesus’ day believed that when the Last Days arrived, all the dead would be resurrected. Paul is agreeing with that. Jesus is the first and the rest of us will follow; there just happens to be 2,000 years, so far, between the first person to be resurrected, Jesus, and the rest of us. To use Paul’s agricultural metaphor of Jesus as the “first fruits,” God’s harvest is underway, it just seems to be taking a long time, by our measure of time at least.

If this all seems just a bit too fantastical and even weird to you, consider our affirmation of Jesus’ resurrection. That doesn’t seem so fantastical only because we’ve gotten used to the idea. But once you’ve accepted as true the claim that Jesus was resurrected and walked out of the tomb after having died . . . well, then everything is on the table. Being a Christian actually takes a big imagination, a mind and heart that refuses to try and shrink God into a small box that seems “reasonable” to us.

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Just another workday. Peter and the others have gathered early to go out and catch fish. They are fisherman by trade. They may have met the resurrected Jesus, but life must still go on.
  - a. Christians have always lived in anticipation of Jesus’ return. So should we. Yet, our lives are still be lived. How can we go about the day-to-day without losing the ever present hope of Jesus’ return?
  - b. What is our role in this world until Jesus does return?
2. A net teeming with fish where there had been none a moment before. Yes, this is yet another demonstration of Jesus’ power. But what else do you think it means? What theological meaning could John hope we’d get from this miracle?
3. So . . . Jesus cooks breakfast for everyone and they all share a meal. Some loaves of bread and some fish. How could this relate to the story of Jesus’ feeding a multitude (John 6)?
  - a. What does this story tell us about the nature of Jesus’ resurrection? Does he strike you as having a physical body of some sort?
  - b. Why do you think John doesn’t tell us more about the exact nature of Jesus’ resurrection? He seems to want to tell us only what happened, free of any theorizing or speculation.
4. The accompanying resurrection text for this week is 1 Corinthians 15:12-23. The Corinthian Christians seem to not believe they will be resurrected as Jesus was resurrected. In this passage, Paul faces up to what it would mean if Jesus was not actually resurrected.
  - a. Put Paul’s words in 15:18 into your own words. (“Fallen asleep” is a euphemism for having died.)
  - b. What do you think it means when Paul refers to Jesus as the “firstfruits” of those who have died? Who do you think are the “secondfruits”?

## *Daily Bible Readings*

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p><b>Monday, Matthew 28:1-15</b> Matthew's account of the resurrection.</p>	<p><b>Tuesday, Matthew 28:16-20</b> Jesus prepares to return to the Father and gives his disciple their commission.</p>
<p><b>Wednesday, 1 Corinthians 15:35-58</b> The nature of the resurrected body, Jesus' and our own. This will be part of next week's study.</p>	<p><b>Thursday, Ephesians 1:15-23</b> A thanksgiving and prayer. Notice in particular verses 20 and 21.</p>
<p><b>Friday, Colossians 2:6-15</b> Spiritual fullness in Christ. Notice that in verse 12, Paul says that we have been "raised with Christ" – past tense. What do you think he could mean?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Weekly Joys and Concerns</b></p>

