

May We Grow Back, Not to What Was, But to What We Can Become

Sunday, April 18, 2021 | The Second Sunday After Easter | [Luke 24:36b-48](#)
Knox-Metropolitan United Church | Regina, SK | Treaty 4 Territory Cameron Fraser

I ran across a scholarly article this week pondering this passage.

It was titled...

Did Jesus eat the fish?

Pondering of course the line:

They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Our reading this morning perhaps invites us to move towards a theology of ichthyology.

Ichthyology being of course the branch of zoology interested in fish.

In this case however, our pun can be extended (and I am deeply committed to taking wordplay and puns as deep as possible).

This this takes place at a time in the narrative in which the company of Jesus' disciples, or as Dr. Bill Richards (our guest for coffee conversation on Palm Sunday suggests) apprentices (which offers a difference in thinking) – this all occurs while these are in hiding, for fear of the Judean authorities after the arrest and subsequent execution of Jesus of Nazareth and the accounts of resurrection are only just beginning.

The text doesn't stipulate how long they have been in hiding and whether they have been sending someone out to covertly seek supplies. So we might ponder, whether this piece of fish has perhaps begun to spoil.

Add to that the fact the Jesus of the text has just shown off wounded hands which are now eating questionable seafood...perhaps meaning that we are in fact dealing with an icky theology of ichthyology!

Credit to Julian Wotherspoon who a while ago offered up the connection of theology and ichthyology with a challenge to work it into a sermon!

Incidentally, the ichthus is the name for what is more commonly called a *Jesus Fish*

Like what people put on a car

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variations_of_the_ichthys_symbol#/media/File:Ichthys_C-Class.jpg

The fish was an important early Christian symbol.

For generations if not centuries it was more important and central than that of a cross.

Which itself is worth pondering – the difference that makes.

It was a symbolic representation of the Eucharist meal, what we call communion.

Now, when we engage in this, we use small cubes of bread and little cups of juice, but the symbolic link of the fish matches with general assumptions that early Christian practice of Eucharist (which comes from the Greek word for Thanks/Gratitude) was much more in the context of meal.

<https://religionnews.com/2019/08/29/dinner-church-movement-sets-the-table-for-food-faith-and-friendships/>

The modern Dinner church movement of which KM's experiments with Open Table and Waffle Church seeks to reintegrate this.

The fish also symbolically links Eucharist to the feeding narratives in the Christian Scriptures which are understood to have been much more central to the early Christian movement.

In these feeding stories, large crowds of thousands are fed with bread and fish in celebration of abundance as the resources which are gratefully offered and blessed are found to be more than enough, when thoughtfully distributed.

Reading the stories of large crowds being fed abundantly and everyone sharing and dispersing resources offers a nuance to Eucharist or Communion that perhaps we modern practitioners of the sacrament miss.

Radical Hospitality and redistributive justice as rehearsed in these narratives were central aspects of the early Christian Movement.

<https://justfaith.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/All-ate-and-were-satisfied-Ched-Myers.pdf>

Today we might look at the Guru Nanak Free Kitchen, a project of Regina's Sikh Community, or the newly opened Cathedral Community Fridge as examples of this ethos.

<https://leaderpost.com/news/local-news/guru-nanak-free-kitchens-mission-is-all-about-humanity>

<https://www.facebook.com/CathedralCommunityFridge>

Incidentally during our Zoom Coffee today, Dan will be chatting with Brianna, one of the instigators of this project.

It is interesting to think that for the early church, the fish, symbolizing all of this, was the central symbol through which they understood themselves.

It would be interesting to ponder the difference between a cross and a fish as a central symbol.

I wonder what comes to you when you ponder this?

As the centuries continue, the ichthus (the Jesus fish) also takes on meaning as an acrostic.

In Koine Greek, the vernacular of the Mediterranean world, the language in which the Christian Scriptures often named the New Testament are written, the phrase

"Ιησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱός Σωτήρ",

Iēsoûs Khrīstós, Theoû Huiós, Sōtḗr

Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour

Iota

Chi

Theta

Upsilon

Sigma

I C H T U S

If you're confused with the "I" being the connected to Jesus (which we spell today with an "I") you may recall that in *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade* this same spelling issue emerges in the second of 3 challenges in the final scenes in the Temple of the Sun...in which Indian Jones needs to step on the letters that spell Jehovah etched on the floor because those letters are reinforced while the others will cause one to break through and fall into a pit, which almost happens when Dr. Jones Jr (aka Indiana) initially fails to remember that in Latin "Jehovah begins with an "I".

<https://imgur.com/gallery/MAlejE2>

The fish symbol plays an interesting role in the centuries during which Christianity as a movement is at odds with the Roman Empire (although this is a history that perhaps requires some nuance especially as it sometimes today feeds problematically into North American narratives of

Christianity being targeted – something we are seeing play out in disturbing ways these past few weeks in Alberta particularly).

<https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/gracelife-church-holds-secret-service-after-ahs-fenced-facility-for-violating-public-health-orders>

Now today, the practice of putting a ICTHUS, a Jesus fish on one's car is an interesting cultural dynamic and I wonder how that lands for you who are watching?

I wonder how you feel about that?

Perhaps there are even those who are joining us who have such a decal on your car, and if so, I wonder what it means to you?

I wonder how the way it is understood broadly in culture influences your choice?

Unfortunately, this practice is very embedded in a particular framing of Christianity which is about signalling about oneself a religious superiority, making a claim to a cultural position of centrality and entitlement – which isn't to say that everyone who does it is trying to say that – but we do well to recognize that there is a substantial cultural trend that one might be unknowingly reflecting which may not be one's intention.

This is a far cry from the early church use of the symbol to speak of radical hospitality and an ethic of redistributive economic justice.

Apart from fitting in with the fishy term of theology of ichthyology which has been central to this reflection thus far, this offers a context to ponder another (non-fish) aspect of this morning's reading.

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

You are witnesses of these things.

Witness can be a word that makes us uncomfortable.

Embedded in this tension is one of the questions that really intrigues me about current conversations in progressive Christianity.

Shall we understand Christianity primarily as a set of beliefs which we adopt, or a way of being which we practice?

In particular I am thinking this in relation to the phrase:

that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name

So there is only so much nuance one can bring to any discussion in the context of a Sunday morning reflection, so please consider this an invitation to thought and discussion rather than an attempt to wrap it up all neatly.

In the narratives of the Gospels themselves, one does not read Jesus establishing doctrinal declarations and amassing an allegiance of followers.

Far from it.

We read instead Jesus engaging in projects, one might even say, a campaign of restoration and reconciliation within the fractured communities of Galilee struggling in a moment of turmoil, that of Roman occupation.

We read Jesus inviting practices of Sabbath restraint and Jubilee redistribution where accumulation was the norm, and we see Jesus particularly calling those with wealth to recognize their participation in the increasing inequalities, repenting – making reparations, and working to re-integrate into the community.

I have returned recently to a book I read in the summer of 2020, *Healing Resistance: A Radically Different Response to Harm* by Kazu Haga who is a trainer and practitioner of Kingian Nonviolence – the practice of restorative justice work that follows from the teaching and legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

<https://irresistible.org/podcast/60>

https://turning.ca/?searchtype=keyword&q=Kazu+Haga&qsb=file=&q=h.tvviewer&using_sb=status&qsb=keyword

Haga the founder of the East Point Peace Academy who is Japanese-American and found his way to King's legacy via his embeddedness in the Nipponzan Myohoji stream of Buddhism (his book is published incidentally by the company founded by Thich Nhat Hanh.

Drawing on an understanding of meditation, yoga, and martial arts, Haga suggests that one think about nonviolence like this...

One does not believe in yoga, meditation or Tai Chi.

One does not become yoga, meditation, or Tai Chi.

One enters into a lifelong commitment to and practice of yoga, meditation, or Tai Chi.

The same can be said of nonviolence as Dr. King understood, taught and practiced the concept.

I think this is an interesting way to ponder the way our passage from Luke ends.

Do we achieve repentance and forgiveness?

Do we hold them as doctrinal or theological positions?

Are they like something that can be attached using adhesive to the back of our car?

Or are they to be embraced in terms similar to what Haga taught of the legacy of Dr. King?

Mark Scandrette is the founder of Relmagine, a centre for integral Christian practice.

<http://www.markscandrette.com/#current-events>

He notes that if one was to use a metaphor to describe the way Christian community is often structured in North America, a Lecture Hall would come to mind.

One person speaking.

Others listening.

By contrast, he notes that in his reading of the Christian Scriptures, a dojo, a house of practice might be more appropriate.

A place in which practice is refined.

As we think about what it means to be church and community seeking to walk well and faithfully out of a time of upheaval in which we find ourselves, seeking to

Grow back not to what was but to What we Can become

I wonder how this paradigm shift might help us?

A commitment to engaging in practices of restoration and healing.

A community in which performative means not the adding of something superficial that is about appearance, but performative in the sense of the practicing of new ways of being that make new ways of living possible.

Where we commit to the healing work of self, relationships, and community, and we commit to becoming practitioners of methodologies that are restorative and healing.

There is of course so much else to say here, and a conversation about how the practice of Kingian Nonviolence, which itself, is a methodology for engaging in restoration through the way of Jesus, might offer wisdom.

I hope this opens up something of possibility, and I am eager to engage in conversation about where this might lead us.

Thanks be to God.