

of death, of becoming disconnected from life and people and God and just going through the biological motions—mouthing clichés and not participating in life itself.

THE LOSS OF OUR RESURRECTION IDENTITY

This distraction and diversion is what makes for a crisis in Christian identity—a crisis current among us. Our basic connection to life is severed, and we begin borrowing our identities from therapists and entertainers, CEOs and politicians, pastors and teachers, men and women who appear to be on the frontlines and making a difference in the world.

So what I want to do is reaffirm this primary identity that we've been given by the resurrection of Jesus. This identity is nurtured and matured in our formation-by-resurrection.

It's a curious thing but not uncommon for Christians to begin well and gradually get worse. Instead of progressing like a pilgrim from strength to strength, we regress. Just think of the Christians you really admire. Aren't most of them recent converts? Isn't it exciting? Then think of the Christians that you're just bored to death with. Aren't they people who have been Christians for forty or fifty years? They are wearing out—not just in body but in

everything else too. There are exceptions, of course.

We lose our vitality. We become dull. We continue to go through these life-affirming, Christ-honoring motions, but our hearts are no longer in it.

The regression is rarely dramatic. It's not sudden. We start out with life, life, life, and more life. God is primary and present in all we do. But then while we're happily and innocently going about our work, our feet get tangled up in those cords of Sheol, those ropes of death. It is so casual at first that we hardly notice. But then one cord gets attached—who knows how?—to an ankle by a double half hitch. Then there's another and another. Before we know it, we are regressing. We are hobbled. We become less. We lose the immediacy, spontaneity, and exuberance of resurrection life.

Interestingly, this often takes place at the same time we're becoming successful in the eyes of our peers, associates, employers, or congregations. But the life is leaking out. God and life have become disconnected.

Using Charity's "Let's just get on with life" and the psalmist's "I walk before the LORD in the land of the living," I want to continue to build something of a dike against some of the forces that erode our resurrection identity. I think this is the most important thing we can be doing. But American Christians are conspicuously

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inattentive. We have this rich, rich tradition of formation-by-resurrection—why are so few interested? I've been a pastor for forty-three years now, and I'm appalled by my brother and sister pastors who are just not interested. There are so many more exciting things to do. But this is patient, cumulative, careful, artful work that needs constant attention, and we're not giving it the attention it needs.

ORDINARY MEALS ARE FORMATIONAL

I want to try to snip some of these life-hobbling cords of Sheol off our ankles by giving attention to resurrection meals. Jesus' resurrection is twice revealed in the setting of a meal. Two of our Gospel writers—Luke and John—insist on the importance of resurrection meals. The unimaginable transcendence of resurrection is assimilated into the most routine and ordinary of actions—eating a meal. We have a long tradition among Christians, given shape and content by our Scriptures, that practices the preparing, serving, and eating of meals as formational for living the resurrection. A culture of inhospitality forebodes resurrection famine.

Luke's meal was eaten on the day of the resurrection at the end of the seven-mile walk from Jerusalem to

Emmaus (see 24:13-32). Two people, Cleopas and a friend (or, as some people think, his wife) were joined by a third person they did not recognize. The unrecognized stranger picked up a conversation with them.

The subject of the conversation was, of course, Jesus. It's probable that it was a long conversation, of which we have only a summary here. My guess is that they walked and talked for two, maybe even three, hours. I calculate that from my experience in walking with my wife, Jan. When we walk together and don't dawdle too much, we go at a pace of about twenty minutes a mile, or three miles an hour. Conversation usually slows us down to something more like two miles an hour. Jan and I usually have binoculars, and that slows us down even more. But, if Jesus joined those two within a mile or so of setting out to Emmaus, and they walked and talked together for about six miles, that comes out to roughly two or three hours. That's enough time to go into things in considerable depth.

IN THE PRESENCE OF RESURRECTION

Luke tells us that the conversation went over the details of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, which was still very fresh in their minds. They discussed their thoughts and feelings

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about Jesus: the immense authority and sense of divine presence they associated with him. They described him as "a prophet, dynamic in work and word" (verse 19, MSG). They talked about the expectations that had been aroused in them. Those centuries of accumulating hopes planted by the prophets and nurtured in the prayers and study and faithful living of generation after generation of the Hebrew people had germinated in them: "We had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about to deliver Israel" (verse 21, MSG). And, of course, they mentioned the rumors that were buzzing back in Jerusalem: "Some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and they couldn't find his body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn't see Jesus" (verses 22-24, MSG).

Up until then, the conversation had been dominated by Cleopas and friend. Jesus started the conversation with his questions, but then he was content to listen to them talking about him. The Emmaus-bound pair had no idea that the person they were talking to was also the person they were talking about. They were in the presence of resurrection, walking "in the land of the living," and they didn't know it.

When Jesus broke in and took up his end of the conversation, he picked up the fragments of their conversation and fit them into the large and comprehensive revelation written in the Holy Scriptures. He showed them, detail by detail, how what had thrown them into bewilderment and confusion made perfect sense when seen and heard as part of what God had been doing and saying all along. Holy Scripture is an orientation in largeness and coherence. Holy Scripture rescues us from out-of-breath stutters of distracted and amnesiac journalists who think they are keeping us in touch with what is important. As the Emmaus pilgrims listened to Jesus expounding on the Scriptures that day, they realized that they weren't dealing with the latest thing but with the oldest thing. They were, as we say, "getting the picture."

What a conversation that was! Later recalling what had gone on, they said, "Didn't we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?" (verse 32, MSG).

Then they walked on into the village of Emmaus—their destination. Cleopas and friend pressed the still-unrecognized Jesus to come in and have supper with them. The three of them sat down at the supper table, and that is where it happened: "They recognized him" (verse 31). Or, as they later described to their friends back in

Jerusalem, "The bread" (verse

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