

Alleluia, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed, alleluia!

Blessed be the holy trinity, one God, amen.

He was born in 1938 and grew up in a dirt floor shack, hidden away in a valley miles and years outside of town. Nature blanketed the ground with kudzu, that wild and horrible vine that ate the south. The nearest metropolis would have been New Albany. The county seat of Union County in northeast Mississippi. I never got to meet him. He died in 1990 just around the time my mom found out she was expecting me. His memory is as compelling and complicated as anyone born in that part of the world at that time. Isn't that true of all of us, though. Simultaneously sinner and saint. As Brennon Manning put it, each of us, always a bundle of paradoxes and contradictions? I carry a bit of him with me wherever I go even if I go long stretches of time without consciously thinking of him. Yet, I become more fully myself when I remember him and tell the story of his past. The triumphs and especially the failures. And bring him into my present. He is more fully known. And his life is more fully redeemed. In that memory a part of me is re-membered. Put back together. He was my grandpa. His name was Troy.

There is a charcoal fire there.

The disciples have returned to what they used to know. Their former life has been brought unwillingly into their present. Their future is now filled with unknowns. Rowan Williams mentions that, for the disciples on this night, it is as if Jesus had never been. Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were there. They had dropped everything. Their nets and all they had known to follow Jesus where he led. And now everything has changed. Taking up their nets again they head out for a night of fishing. Accompanied by the twin emotions of loss and failure they set out on old familiar waters. Emblematic of all that had happened, at the end of the excursion they have nothing to show for it.

Amidst all of that, as night begins to fade, and the first light of dawn begins to lift over the horizon; recognition slowly comes over them. A voice invites them to put their nets on the other side of the boat. Surprising abundance begins to fill their empty nets. The beloved one is the first to name it: It is the Lord! Recognition comes more into focus as he invites them to breakfast. Grilling fish on the beach he also takes bread and gives it to them.

This is not the end of the encounter though. Jesus has more to show. The recognition is just a bit blurry still. It must get clearer. Williams continues, "The disciples recognize Jesus as Lord and themselves as disciples but that buried past in which they were his disciples, the past that is slowly returning is also the past of their desertion and failure." After all, they are around a charcoal fire. Just like that the threefold ghosts of past and memory and shame flood back into Peter's mind and body. Jesus meets him there as he comes face to face with all that he has done. He sees clearly now his painful history. In

that vulnerable re-telling of life and in the risen One's presence: he is remembered. As the former archbishop of Canterbury says so well, "Peter, in being present to Jesus becomes painfully and nakedly present to himself: but that restoration to him of an identity of failure is also the restoration of an identity of hope." Peter and all that he is, now brought fully into the new life of his Lord.

We have our own charcoal fires. There are embers that burn hot and haunt us. The kindling may have a name. Betrayal. Whether we were the betrayed or the betrayer. Failure. Dissertation. Regret. Shame. Maybe it is the marred and messy mosaic that is your own history and bloodline that you cannot quite shake. Something about it keeps you from moving forward. You keep returning there and leaving with nets empty. Then there is our own sin. Things we have done and not done. Our own participation in systems and structures leave us feeling helpless in the face of so much suffering and inequity. Around that charcoal fire the one who knows us and cares for us with a love that is stronger than death looks us in the eye.

We find ourselves on this day around another flame. Our Easter fire is still burning atop this paschal candle. Here its light leads us to our own beach. We wash up to this shore and find a meal of surprising abundance is prepared for us. Not bread and fish but bread and wine. In this breakfast we recognize Jesus and he recognizes us. In his broken body and shed blood given for you, we, on this day, with all that we have been and will be, are re-membered.

With Peter we stand before Jesus. He holds our life in his arms and invites us to lay our burdens before him. The things we hold confidently and things that are too heavy for us. Those things that live inside us sometimes only unconsciously. To tell him the story of our lives unvarnished for he already knows all things and has never taken his gaze away from you. To let this Christ who has been to death and back again draw it out of us and draw us into his embrace. All will be well. In this broad place gathered around the fire's warmth we can allow ourselves to hear his voice speak to you, you are forgiven. You are re-membered. Put back together, piece by piece. You have been brought fully again and again into the life that is yours in baptism. A life of sheer and undying grace. Fully known we are fully redeemed.

Our memory is transformed by the savior. This re-membering gives way to hope. Hope that is clear eyed. It is a hope that is no longer illusory but trustworthy. Hope that is durable. Hope that calls a thing what it is and bears witness to God's future. A future that holds the past and present together as it opens up to something new all at the same time.

We proclaim God's mighty acts in history every time we come to this table to receive the bread of life. And we hear, by faith, that we, and all the lost and neglected ones throughout history are also re-membered, recapitulated, restored, made whole, in his betrayal, suffering, death and resurrection.

From this meal, following the cross into our lives we participate in faithful remembering-anamnesis. Gathering up the stories and lifting up the voices of those once forgotten, in our neighborhoods, families, world- even within us. On the other side of the empty tomb, it all belongs.

He calls you by name and says, “follow me.”

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