

## How Jesus Transforms: Jesus Clarifies

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Have you ever had a look on your own face of utter bewilderment? A look that suggests that your senses are perceiving something that your mind can't quite comprehend? And that even your body doesn't seem to know what to do? The people who encountered Jesus for the first time after his resurrection would have reacted like that! This was something completely new!... something they had never imagined was even possible. But here he is!...and now they have to deal with that incredible...literally, unbelievable... new reality. Maybe their reaction, while more intense and momentary, is similar to the bewilderment we have felt in the past 40 days or so...similar enough for them to help us process our own reactions. If someone had told us on January 1 that we'd be largely confined to our homes, wearing masks, businesses shut down, no church services!... we'd have laughed them off. Yet here we are!... rightly or wrongly, for a little while longer or maybe more, who knows?

What an opportunity this is! We said last week that the way Jesus' earliest friends were transformed after his resurrection is the same way we, too, are transformed. And here we are!... given the chance to feel just a bit of what they felt... given the chance to know the same risen Jesus!... given the chance to be transformed. Let's not waste the pain OR the gifts of this experience. That's why this is our theme for this whole month of May... to follow them in their transformation and so to be changed ourselves. So how are we transformed in moments like this? It doesn't "just happen." But it's not our work....it's God's. It's a partnership...and our part is to pay attention to what God is inviting us into, and then to respond. Last week we explored the good news that Jesus comforts... particularly in our moments of bewilderment. Jesus gives us what we need, so we can move on in the process of transformation...

Yes, as we are comforted by Jesus and given some time to feel safe and grounded, Jesus offers us an initial response to the question asked by the Centurion in the clip, and by everyone who has authentically engaged Jesus' resurrection: "How can this be?" This is a movement in the transformation process in which Jesus Clarifies... or, at least, begins to clarify. :)

That's because at this point in the process, although some of the fear and bewilderment is starting to settle down, the mind is still reeling and not thinking logically. How could it be? Resurrection makes no logical sense. It challenges one of the undisputed facts about the way things work... people are born, live for a time, then die... and stay dead. Jesus amazed people by raising Lazarus and others from death... but they were not resurrected... their bodies would once again die and decay. Jesus' resurrection was a whole new thing... which made absolutely no sense... and, yes, needed to be clarified a bit so those first disciples could accept its reality... and move into the rest of the transformation process. :)

So, what does it mean that Jesus clarifies? Well, as we just noticed, the heads of those who witnessed the Risen Jesus were still a bit addled... and unable to consider it logically. So, Jesus does not appeal first to their heads. He does not give them a Resurrection 101 lecture with an accompanying workbook so they can fill in the blanks with precise definitions and theological concepts. A time will come for head

understanding, but at this point... Jesus is less focused on the way the head knows... and more focused on the way the heart knows. Jesus offers them grace that reveals down in their core what is really real... especially at a time when there were no words to describe it or explain it yet!

Jesus clarifies by giving them... and us, too... the grace to “know deep down in our knower” what is really real. :) We see this particularly in three stories of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances...

The first of these encounters occurred the day of the resurrection. Two disciples... one of them named Clopas, the other perhaps his wife... had heard Mary’s story of meeting Jesus in the garden, outside the tomb, early that morning... and they didn’t know what to make of it, but it wasn’t enough to keep them in Jerusalem. They were going home to Emmaus...not too far... 7 miles outside of Jerusalem. It was the day after Sabbath, the Sabbath after Passover, and the road was busy that day...and in a culture where everyone walked or rode, where even short distances took some time, it was common to strike up conversations with strangers on the road. And that’s what happened on this day. Someone heading in the same direction came up on them and said, in essence, “Hey guys, what’s up?”

“What’s up?? Are you the only person on this road who is NOT talking about what happened over the weekend?” They explained to him who Jesus was. And then the stranger explained to *them* even more who Jesus was! He clarified for them that Jesus was the One who was promised and had done what was promised... and it must have been amazing! But they didn’t even write it down... why? Probably because their minds were not comprehending all of this, not yet. *Another* part of them was reacting, however... later that evening they looked at each other and said, **“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32 NIV).**

One of the great revival leaders of church history, John Wesley, used a similar phrase when describing the moment that he received the clarity he needed. He had a master’s degree from Oxford University, he was ordained an Anglican priest, he had even been a missionary... but he did not have confidence in his faith. So he prayed for it, and one night in a Bible study his heart was “strangely warmed.” He said, “I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me...” It was not his mind that needed to be warmed, it was his *heart*...for it is with our heart that we truly, deeply trust.

The heartwarming of the two disciples turned into that kind of assurance later that evening... when they invited the stranger to share dinner. ***When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him (Luke 24:30-31 NIV).*** That was their moment of clarity. He did what he had done just three nights before. They had not understood then but now could, at least with their hearts. His body had been broken for them like the bread, but it was now restored... and this was their friend, Jesus, smiling at them across the table... like he smiles at you and me when our own eyes and hearts are opened to what is really real...

Our second story is actually an extension of the first. A moment after the two in Emmaus recognized Jesus, He disappeared. And they did what we would do... looked at each other and ran back to Jerusalem as fast as they could to tell the rest of the disciples what they had experienced! When they got there, they found

all the disciples together, celebrating that Jesus was alive because of all the reports of His appearances. The two from Emmaus added theirs... and as they were all talking, Jesus showed up for the party! ...and His friends' jaws dropped open... so Jesus offers them some more clarification...

**Luke 24:37-41, TPT -- Standing there among them he said, "Be at peace. I am the living God. Don't be afraid. Why would you be so frightened? Don't let doubt or fear enter your hearts, for I AM! Come and gaze upon my pierced hands and feet. See for yourselves, it is I, standing here alive. Touch me (*notice that Jesus keeps inviting them to use their physical senses to validate reality... see, touch...*) and know (*this is the Greek word *eido* which means to physically see... know with your own eyes*)... that my wounds are real. See (*lit. = discern/acknowledge through your own experience*) that I have a body of flesh and bone."** (*Reminds us of Jesus inviting Thomas to do this same thing.*) **He showed them his pierced hands and feet and let them touch his wounds. The disciples were ecstatic yet dumbfounded, unable to fully comprehend it.**

Jesus isn't talking to their heads... He is first feeding much-needed information to their bodies. But even as they touch Him, they still aren't able to believe their own senses! So Jesus goes yet another step, and asks them to feed Him! They give Him fish and honeycomb, and as he chews and swallows, Jesus clarifies for them as He did for the two Emmaus disciples: **Luke 24:41-45, TPT -- "Don't you remember the words that I spoke to you when I was still with you? I told you that everything written about me would be fulfilled, including all the prophecies from the law of Moses through the Psalms and the writings of the prophets—that they would all find their fulfillment."** He *supernaturally unlocked their understanding to receive the revelation of the Scriptures...*

This is so cool! Literally, it says that Jesus "up-through-opened" their minds ... He supernaturally opened what they had been seeing and feeling and experiencing through their bodies and in their hearts UP INTO their minds... to understand... but again, this is not a head word... this is a word that means to "bring together in union in the present moment." What is being brought together? Well, it appears that Jesus is supernaturally bringing together as one in that moment the disciples' physical experience and deep, heart knowing... and empowering their minds to receive reality that the human mind cannot comprehend on its own... This is called revelation.

Think of the scene in "The Miracle Worker" (*if you want to watch it, go back to the webpage for the link, watch it, and come back here when you're done*) If not, you can watch it later and I'll describe it here... it's the scene where exhausted teacher Annie Sullivan, feeling like an utter failure, has had enough of blind, deaf, and spoiled little Helen Keller. She takes Helen in one hand and a pitcher in the other... and heads out to the water pump. She wants Helen to pump water into the pitcher, but Helen refuses... so Annie does it... the water gushes out... Annie holds Helen's hand in the flow... signing "W-A-T-E-R" into her palm, clarifying again and again. And then... Helen changes completely... she grabs Annie's hand... puts it under the water and signs into it, W-A-T-E-R... Annie holds Helen's hands to her face and nods, Yes! Then Helen falls in the ground, signalling for Annie to tell her what this is... "G-R-O-U-N-D"... Yes! Tree... Bell... Mother... and finally, she knows a reality beyond her physical senses... and is able to know who Annie really is, 'T-E-A-C-H-E-R."

Annie is such a beautiful picture of our Teacher, Jesus... and the way He patiently clarifies until we, like Helen, can experience those revelatory moments when it all comes together as one... and we know that we know what is real beyond anything we can know... and we are completely changed... and everything is completely changed... and there is no going back... or desire to go back!

What we can be... and what the world is asking for... are Christians who don't just talk about resurrection, but who have actually experienced its reality for themselves... and have been so changed, so humbled by the revelation, that their puny human minds have acknowledged their limits and have bowed down before the All-Knowing One. Only then is anyone able to truly understand or interpret the scriptures... and only then is anyone safe with them.

The third story occurred some time later when the immediate shock of the resurrection had worn off a bit, and the disciples were beginning to adjust to the new reality. Like Helen Keller now knew what the name of that sensation of cool water on her fingers was and could build on that revelation to experience new things, so the disciples now knew that their friend was alive and they were building on that revelation to experience even more of this fresh reality. It was still confusing in many ways...Jesus was alive again, but things were not as they were before. Jesus's body looked like his old one, but was somehow different. Jesus was with them, at least from time to time, but talked about going away. Their minds did not yet comprehend it all.

He had told the 12 to go back home to Galilee, so they did. But what to do while they're hanging out and waiting for Jesus? Most of them were fishermen... so they went fishing! These guys seemed to never have a good experience fishing! Either a big storm comes up, and Jesus has to rescue them from it, or they turn out to be pretty lousy fishermen. This is one of those nights... 7 of them, and no fish. All night. The next morning, at dawn, they see a guy on the shore... too far away to see his face, but close enough to yell back and forth. He shouted, "Hey guys... throw your net into the water on the other side of the boat!" It was stupid advice... it's the same water!...and both fish and water move. But for reason...fatigue, or perhaps instinct...they do it...and suddenly their net gets really, really heavy.

And then one of the disciples gets some instant clarity... they've done this before! Jesus had told them one other time to put their net down on the other side and, just like now, they had caught more fish than they could handle. ***Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" (John 21:7 NIV).*** It's Jesus! Don't you see, Peter? Peter does see...he has his own moment of clarity then...and his heart responds before his mind does. He jumps into the water and swims to shore!... so much in a rush to see Jesus again. When they finally get the boat and fish on shore, however, they're not standing with mouths agape in utter confusion this time. Rather, they count the fish!...as if the very numbering of them tells us something important about how they're processing things now. And John tells us why: ***None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord (John 21:12 NIV).***

The Greek word translated as "knew" here means to perceive, or to see, what has been revealed. Jesus had been reveal God and God's ways all along...in his incarnation, through his parables and miracles, in

his dying and rising... and he was still doing it now...showing them in his own resurrected life the new realities of the kingdom of God. And so they could actually relax a bit with him now... they're counting fish, eating breakfast, and chatting by the seashore. Through Jesus' clarifying process, they are gradually trusting, even enjoying this new life!...and they certainly don't want to go back to life as it used to be anymore! You see, this was the third time Jesus appeared to them. They had experienced his comfort...they had come to the confidence that although they were in a radically transformed place with no idea where this was going or what would be happening, they could trust *him*... and as they adjusted more and more, they could also have faith and trust his process...

....and so can we. He knows what He's doing, so let's settle into the "now" and trust that when we need to know more, He will show and tell us. He will clarify. So, how does this look for us? What can we do to respond to and receive the clarity that Jesus is offering us in our time of bewilderment and confusion? These three stories give us some simple, practical ideas for that.

First, let's look to the past... and lean into memory. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus recognized Jesus when he broke bread with them... again. The disciple on the boat recognized Jesus when he filled their nets with fish... again. Revisiting those former experiences...and, in their case, even reliving them... provided the clarity they needed. Our memories with Jesus can likewise become real again for us. We can revisit them prayerfully in our imagination. Was there a moment in your life when Jesus became more real to you than ever before? A time when your own heart was strangely warmed, an experience that changed your life? Revisit that moment... allow yourself to feel again what you felt then, ask Jesus to help you know a bit of the clarity you experienced in that moment. Do what Mary the mother of Jesus did, and treasure that memory, ponder it in your heart even more than your mind... allow yourself to know, particularly now in this season of stress and bewilderment, what your heart knew then.

And, by the way, if you're listening to this and saying, "Wow... I don't think I have ever had one of those clarifying moments... I have never yet experienced the reality of Jesus' presence in a way that warmed my heart and allowed me to see him that way"... then ask him for it. Pause and ask him right now.... :)

Look to the past and lean into memory... leads to the second practical idea... Stay aware in the present... and discern your daily experience. Although we can't see the Risen Jesus with our physical eyes at this time in history, He is still always present with us. No matter where we are or what we are doing... working or eating... hiking or binge-watching historical documentaries... alone or six-feet apart in community... no matter what we are feeling... even when we are bewildered and our minds are trying desperately to figure out what's real and what it all means... like the disciples in the first days and weeks following the Resurrection... Jesus is there, clarifying in so many different ways...if we will only pay attention!

The Celtic Christian tradition says that "We fail to see Christ, not because He is absent, but because we are blind." But for those with eyes to see, and ears to hear, nothing is ordinary... God uses everything in our lives, inside and out, to reveal Himself to us... gently and continually inviting us to notice and experience Jesus' presence through our circumstances and relationships... our physical senses... emotions and desires... those thoughts that are just too good to be ours. :)

Just as the first disciples needed visible, tangible reality to connect to invisible, spiritual reality... so do we... and God's Spirit offers this to us all the time... that experience of one particular bird singing outside your window that suddenly causes your spirit to rise and "know" this is more than just a bird... that experience of longing to talk to a friend, then calling to discover your friend desperately needed to hear from you... that experience of "aha" moments, large and small, where you know that your mind alone could never have put all that information together that way... or that dream in which your long-past grandmother appears to you so young and so alive...and so very real. In these and countless other ways, the Risen Christ invites you to pay attention... to trust that He is present... and wanting to teach you how to discern what is real from what isn't... so you can simply enjoy being alive with Him in this wonderful world!

Lean into the past, stay aware in the present, and then trust for the future...and relax. None of those disciples knew what the future held for them. During those final weeks, Jesus would give them occasional glimpses of what was in store. But those glimpses only confirmed for them that things were going to be different in ways they could not yet imagine. And so, we get the sense they went with the flow... and it turned out that what was in store for them was far better than they could have guessed!

The same is true of us. Right now our reality is still scary, frustrating, stressful, and mighty perplexing. The news media is running stories about how "from now on everything will be different"...and they're probably partly right. But which parts? What's going to happen to us? What will life look like a year from now? And even if we were not here in all this, we would still have the same questions, wouldn't we? The truth is, none of us knows the future...ever! So we will not have THAT kind of clarity in life. But we can still trust. We can still be at peace. We can still KNOW that Jesus is alive, that what we build our lives on is real, and so we can have genuine hope in ***what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived—the things God has prepared for those who love him (I Cor. 2:9 NIV).***

So now is a good time to give up habits that keep us from peace. Let's avoid the temptation to squawk that the sky is falling!... or to paint overly-rosy pictures... to imagine the worst and best scenarios and act as if they're true. The first leads to darkness... trust me, I know... and the second to disappointment. It will be what it will be, and God will still be God and God will still be good. :) Let's also avoid the temptation to try to control things... we can't...and if we hadn't figured that out before now, this experience will surely lead us to that clarity. :) Some of us are struggling with that right now, aren't we?

What we *can* control are our expectations. And what should we expect? Perhaps only this... that Christ is alive in the world and in us, and that He is outworking His good purposes and His ways in us, through us, and for us. Those ways are not always known to us, which is why this feels uncomfortable. But since we trust him, we can join the disciples on the seashore and relax... really! We can eat our breakfast, thank God he's alive, and recover the joy of simply being with Him as much as we can. :)

At the beginning of these Covid-time messages, we talked about Julian of Norwich... the 14th-century anchorite who survived one of the most devastating pandemic times in history... the black plague that

decimated half the population of England. During this terrible suffering, which even the greatest minds of the time could not explain or end, Julian and many others were longing for a real, personal experience of faith. Nothing made sense anymore... so they were open for Jesus to reveal Himself in new ways.

And that's what happened through the 16 visions Jesus gave Julian... now called *Revelations of Divine Love*. In one of these revelations, Jesus tells Julian: "And all is well, and all is well, and all manner of thing shall be well." Sounds good, but Julian did not accept it at first! She argues with God for the following 13 chapters about how *all* things could not possibly turn out well! She lays all the world's suffering and evil before Jesus and challenges Him to explain how all is or could ever be well. (I love this woman...)

Jesus does not explain... because she could not possibly understand! But He does assure her that over time, God's love, power, and wisdom will, indeed, make all things well... and He invites her to trust Him... and to stop judging life as terrible. He invites her to see reality more fully... and receive the clarity He is offering... that although evil exists, Love has overcome it... so it is LOVE that is really real... and LOVE that has transformed ordinary life, infusing it with grace and goodness if she will only open her eyes and see it. She did... and experienced wonder more than she could ask or think. And then she offered the gift of these revelations to those around her... and they saved them for us...

... and I can't help but wonder what revelations of Divine Love Jesus wants to give US... to challenge us to let go of our old judgmental ideas about how terrible life is, and people are, and maybe even God is.

What revelations might open to us if we would simply experience Jesus for ourselves... and embrace the radically different life He has already given us, if only we just stay with Him... knowing that all is well as He continues to make all manner of thing well? What gift might we offer our world if we would simply practice resurrection with Jesus every day? May we all receive this clarity that only Jesus gives... that our minds know nothing of...

***Now may God, the inspiration and fountain of hope, fill you to overflowing with uncontainable joy and perfect peace as you trust in him (Romans 15:13 TPT).***