



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Articles:

- 📖 On Beyond Easter
(Easter, pp. 67-73)

Suggested Article:

- 📖 The Power of the Resurrection
(Easter, pp. 44-45)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

Institute for Faith and Learning
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97270
Waco, TX 76798-7270
Phone 1-254-710-4805
www.ChristianEthics.ws

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On Beyond Easter

The power of Christ's resurrection is realized most, not in our building of monuments or institutions, but in the breaking of the bread, the quotidian collecting of those whom we love around a table that nourishes us all, and praying God would give us new eyes to see those who belong alongside us.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: John 21:1-14

Meditation†

Surely Christian ethics should ask different questions: Who are we as baptized persons who profess faith in the resurrection? Who or what does the risen Christ want us to become?

Gerald O'Collins, S.J.

Reflection

In the Gospel stories that go "on beyond Easter" – those in which the risen Jesus appears to his disciples – we glimpse how they (and we) are called to keep learning about and spreading the good news of God's kingdom. "Jesus' resurrection is not the culmination of the [gospel] story, but the beginning," Milton Brasher-Cunningham explains. "The story continues with us."

"The way the Gospel writers...tell the story, Jesus started by doing something after the resurrection he had not done before: he cooked. He endured the cross and the grave, came back from the dead, and made breakfast," Brasher-Cunningham wittily observes. "The meal is no small matter."

What is the significance of this meal on the beach in John 21? How might it inform our discipleship "on beyond Easter"?

- ▶ *The meal restores the disciples' hope.* A thread runs through the appearances of the risen Jesus: when he speaks to Mary in the grave yard (John 20:11-18), walks with two disciples to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), visits the room where everyone is gathered (John 20:19-29), and comes to seven disciples who are fishing (John 21), his disciples do not recognize him at first. Perhaps the stories that Jesus was alive could not erase their confusion or quell their grief over his absence. "Things were not as they had been and they could not be fixed," Brasher-Cunningham notes. "They did not yet have the rituals of the Church to comfort them. There were no chapels to go to, no Communion to share. They only knew of their last supper with him and that things had not been right since."

But now Jesus makes breakfast for his seven friends, including the one, Peter, who had disowned him. In this way Jesus offers Peter "the grace to know his betrayal was not the last word. There was something on beyond the courtyard, the cross, and the cemetery, even on beyond the fretful and fruitless night they had just lived through."

- ▶ *The meal brings the disciples together with Christ.* Compare this breakfast to the Last Supper, the meal that we reenact through Communion in order to "remember" Christ (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Brasher-Cunningham explains, "we come to the table to put ourselves back together in Jesus' name. We re-member the Body of Christ as we share the bread and wine, which is an ongoing and difficult task."



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Robert B. Kruschwitz, the author of this study guide, is Senior Scholar in The Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University. He serves as General Editor of *Christian Reflection*.

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At this breakfast, Jesus asks the disciples to remember him once more. "With all the days together, it seems safe to say they ate together as much as they did anything else. Some of the meals made the Gospels, but most were just daily bread: the sharing of sustenance as they went about their lives and work." The disciples are to remember their life together with the Lord and then extend it to others.

- ▶ *The meal reminds us who we are to be.* "Here is the story of the Easter breakfast: Jesus was back at work, remembering those whom he loved, feeding them, forgiving them, and calling them to go and do likewise," Brasher-Cunningham writes. "What if all our meals were markers – altars of forgiveness and belonging? ... Come to the table. Lay down your burdens. Offer forgiveness. Ask for it, too. And bring anyone else you can find. Christ is risen! – pass the potatoes."

"If Communion is the meal that galvanizes us, then perhaps the breakfast on the beach is the meal that reminds us who we are and who we are called to be, and reminds us Easter is the beginning of the gospel, not the final chapter. Go out into the highways and byways of life, to the bars and the beaches, go out on beyond Easter and compel them to come to breakfast."

Study Questions

1. What occurs at (what Milton Brasher-Cunningham calls) "the last breakfast" to restore the disciples' hope? What do the disciples learn about their role in God's kingdom?
2. What role have meals played in bringing your family and your congregation together with Christ?
3. Discuss how communal meals might enrich your celebration of Eastertide.
4. Piero della Francesca's *The Resurrection of Christ* takes the unusual tack for Christian art of imagining the triumphant moment of resurrection itself. How does it depict the world before and after of Christ's resurrection?

Departing Hymn: "Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread"

Be known to us in breaking bread,
but do not then depart;
Savior, abide with us, and spread
your table in our heart.

There eat with us in love divine;
your body and your blood,
that living bread, that heavenly wine,
be our immortal food.

James Montgomery (1825), alt.
Tune: ST. AGNES

† Gerald O'Collins, S.J., *Believing in the Resurrection: The Meaning and Promise of the Risen Jesus* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012), 168.

On Beyond Easter

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand the significance of the breakfast that the risen Christ cooked and served to his disciples.
2. To consider how communal meals can bind us together with one another before Christ.
3. To explore the depiction of the power of Christ's resurrection in Christian art.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of Easter (Christian Reflection) and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread" locate the familiar tune ST. AGNES in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

Milton Brasher-Cunningham writes, "One of the Dr. Seuss books I remember best from my childhood because of how much my father loved it was called *On Beyond Zebra*. The story centers around one boy telling his younger friend how much more he could imagine if he refused to be confined by the prescribed alphabet: there were words and worlds to discover if one kept going 'on beyond zebra.' Dad read it as a metaphor of faith. He was on to something.

In the places I go there are things that I see
That I *never* could spell if I stopped with the Z.
I'm telling you this 'cause you're one of my friends.
My alphabet starts where *your* alphabet ends!" (*Easter*, pp. 68-69)

The opening sentence of Mark's gospel is: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." It signals that Jesus' story is the beginning of the gospel. The good news continues with us—as we learn to go on beyond Easter with Christ.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to guide members as they eat with one another and others as Christ's disciples.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read John 21:1-14 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

In this study Milton Brasher-Cunningham, a writer and chef who blogs at "Don't Eat Alone" (www.donteatalone.com), traces the implications for our discipleship of the risen Jesus appearing to his disciples to cook their

breakfast. You might connect his reflections to the articles and reviews in the *Food and Hunger* issue of Christian Reflection. Here I use his thoughts to help us plan for Eastertide.

Study Questions

1. Milton Brasher-Cunningham suggests three ways that Jesus restores the disciples' hope. First, Jesus restores normalcy to their lives by reminding them of the many meals they had shared together. Brasher-Cunningham explains, "With all the days together, it seems safe to say they ate together as much as they did anything else. Some of the meals made the Gospels, but most were just daily bread: the sharing of sustenance as they went about their lives and work." Furthermore, through the act of cooking the meal Jesus offers forgiveness to Peter, who had disowned him. Finally, when Jesus commissions Peter to "feed my sheep," he gives Peter and the others direction for their discipleship "on beyond Easter."

Brasher-Cunningham summarizes what those first disciples (and we) might learn from this meal about our role in God's kingdom: "Our faith calls us to go on beyond Communion, on beyond the Cross, on beyond the Empty Tomb, to meet each other for breakfast, lunch, and dinner to re-member to keep looking for new words and worlds to describe the indefatigable love of God that breathed us into being, holds us as we walk through these days, and welcomes us when we move beyond this life. We are called to come to the same table. We take our turn as we feed one another, and as we feed the world. The early church gathered for their love feasts, sharing food from house to house, as Acts points out. Whatever they had to do, they knew they had to eat, and so they fed one another. 'As often as you do this' [1 Corinthians 11:26] might mean more than simply observing the Lord's Supper. What if Jesus had in mind that we would re-member every time we broke bread or sat down at the table together? What if Jesus was calling us to widen our sense of every table to include those who harvested the crops and raised the animals, and to make sure they are paid fairly and treated justly?"

3. In regard to their families, members might mention how offering table-grace binds the family together – sometimes across widely-separated places and through generations. Perhaps they remember moments of prayer or worship during special meals at weddings, baptisms, funerals, and so on, or at times of family vacation or celebration.

In regard to your congregation, discuss how Communion is celebrated in regular or seasonal worship services. Have you taken Communion to shut-in members, to those in a nursing home, or shared it with other groups beyond your congregation? Also consider the role of fellowship meals in your congregation, whether they occur on a regular or seasonal basis. Does your congregation provide meals to the elderly or poor in the community, to members with special needs (due to sickness or death), or to those who come to visit your church? How is Christ re-membered on these occasions?

3. Examine the list of family and congregational meals from the previous question. Consider how meals like those might be incorporated into your Eastertide celebration. Discuss how a family or congregational meal and worship time might commemorate (what Brasher-Cunningham calls) "the last breakfast" in John 21.
4. In 'The Power of the Resurrection,' Heidi Hornik describes Piero della Francesca's *The Resurrection of Christ* (1463-1465) as 'one of the most enduring images of Christian victory in Western art.' She explains a visual before-and-after perspective on the resurrection: 'On the left side of Christ the trees in the background are stark and dead, awaiting rebirth, while those on the right are flourishing, symbolizing the rebirth of humanity.' There is an implied, temporal before-and-after perspective as well: the imperial guards who once were watchful and in control are now sleeping, while the Christ who once was dead is now alive and ruling in the world.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.