

## **New Life**

Julie trained as a legal secretary and employed transcribing court proceedings into documents used by judges and juries in their deliberations. It was interesting work and paid the bills, but it wasn't the passion of her heart. Her real joy was in creating and serving delicious meals. She especially noted a need in her community for a place that would provide nutritious soups, sandwiches and wraps for those in offices and under tight timelines for their lunch hour. Whenever she had her friends over, they would say, "Julie, you need to share what you've made for us with a more people. Why don't you open a restaurant near where you presently work? We're sure it would be an instant success!"

The more Julie thought about it, the more she felt this was a signal to start something new in her life. With the help of family, she was able to secure start-up financing to convert a former store into a restaurant providing sit-down and take-out meals. Her recipes now could be shared with the general public, and nothing made her happier. Soon there were line-ups for a table as the news spread that this was a great place to eat. Everyone was amazed at the creative way Julie approached old favorites and added new items to intrigue the tastebuds. This had been the right move, and the many satisfied customers were more than willing to share their experience with colleagues and on social media posts. Julie could have never imagined how much of an impression she would be making on her community in the simple act of serving food.

In today's gospel passage, we read of another account of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, this time with an emphasis on newness – taking the disciples into territory they hadn't been before. It would do well for us to follow their example and look into places where our lives can be rejuvenated, just like Julie's was in our opening story. No matter our age or circumstance, God is always planning ahead and preparing us for the future.

1) new body. “Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it’s really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don’t have bodies, as you see that I do.’ As he spoke, he showed them his hands and feet.” (Luke 24:39-40) The body Jesus appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room wasn’t the same one put in the tomb, but a new and different one with capabilities the old one didn’t have, as he “was suddenly standing there among them.”

(v.36) Although appearing the same, still able to have food (“Do you have anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched.” v.41-42), it no longer was bound by the limitations of the physical body he had before. His ministry could now be expanded not just in place, but in time.

We may think this has no present meaning for us, as we haven’t changed our bodies as Jesus did in the resurrection. But many have found that what they need for the tasks they now have has been supplied: continued good or better health for challenges at work or caregiving, increased energy and passion for projects that need to be completed, a clearer mind to understand decisions that must be made that will impact the days ahead. This is important now, just as our promised new bodies will be then, as the apostle Paul describes, “Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. Our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die, our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44a,50b,53)

2) new understanding. “When I was with you before, I told you everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled.” (Luke 24:44)

The disciples' problem was that they didn't connect that teaching with the events in Jesus' life, every one pointing to his identity as the Son of God. Down to the last moment of his life, Jesus made sure that every word written about him came to pass exactly as it had been prophesied in those three parts of the Hebrew scriptures, for example, the detailed descriptions of his suffering on the cross clearly outlined in Psalm 22. Yet, they needed help in going further in their faith, "Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, 'Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day.'" (v.45-46)

This was exactly what Jesus did with those disciples on the road to Emmaus. "Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scripture the things concerning himself. They said to each other, 'Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?' (Luke 24:26-27,32) We should pray that we'll be granted insight of new understanding of God's Word just as those disciples received.

3) new work. "It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem. There will be forgiveness of sins for all who repent." (Luke 24:47-48) The knowledge of the risen Jesus wasn't to be kept to themselves. It was to be shared with people around the world. That was something those first disciples couldn't have envisioned as they heard these words in the Upper Room. Yet it began soon after with the healing of a lame beggar at Solomon's Colonnade in the temple, "[Peter said] why stare at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power or godliness? Through faith in the name of Jesus, this man was healed – and you know how crippled he was before. Faith in Jesus' name has healed him before your very eyes." (Acts 3:12b,16)

Acting on behalf of and by the power of Jesus' new life, the movement that was started by this commissioning is still going on today thousands of years later. All believers can participate in growing the presence of God's reign in the context they are in: the workplace, the classroom, at home, at church, at the grocery store, in community gatherings, providing care for family and friends. We can be the means that God shines his light and love into the lives of those we relate to each day.

4) new vision. "Then the times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah." (Acts 3:20) Although not in the text of our New Testament reading, this verse continues the theme of newness Peter was discussing earlier. 'Times of refreshing' are needed throughout our lives, and if they're God-directed, even greater results can be expected. Let's see how our Psalm brings up a few points:

- clearer vision of God's presence and response to our needs. "Answer me when I call to you, O God who declares me innocent. Free me from my troubles. Have mercy on me and hear my prayer." (Psalm 4:1) Whatever our petition, faith in the certainty of God's grace and attention to our requests can bring us to a new level of belief and trust, as the psalmist continues, "You can be sure of this: The Lord will answer when I call to him." (v.3)

- clearer vision of God's instructions for better living. "Don't sin by letting anger control you. Think about it overnight and remain silent." (v.4) Excellent advice for better relationships, as quick-tempered people frequently find themselves on the outside of favor.

- clearer vision of God's provision. "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe." (v.8) When we know we're in God's care day or night, we can rest with the assurance of protection wherever we are.

Margaret Nava and her friend Susan were traveling home one afternoon when they noticed a wayside chapel just off the highway in a secluded grove of trees. “Let’s stop there,” Susan said, “We’ve been on the road for several hours and we need a break.” “But why here?” replied Margaret, “There’s a service center just a short distance further on.” “I think this would be better, not so noisy and crowded.” So Margaret pulled into the small parking lot and both got out. “I’m going inside,” Susan told her friend as Margaret went off to look at some historical plaques set up around the enclosure. A comfortable bench in the shade of a big tree was welcome after concentrating on driving for so long.

When Margaret went into the chapel to find Susan, she was alarmed when she saw tear streaks down her face. “What’s the matter? Are you okay?” “Yes, I’ve never been more okay than I am now. Thanks for stopping here. I really needed to be in this quiet place, alone with God. You see, things haven’t been going well at home or at work. I’ve been feeling more alone as I haven’t wanted to bring my problems into your life or those of my family. That was wrong. I need to share the challenges I’m having with others. I especially need to share them with God, something I haven’t been doing. But in here I’ve felt the peace and security of his presence surrounding me. Amazingly, as I’ve prayed, ideas have come that can improve my situation. For the first time in a while, I’m seeing hope, something I wouldn’t have envisioned even as we were driving down the road. It’s true – God loves us wherever we are.”

The appearances of Jesus after the resurrection helped the disciples understand a basic truth about God’s love for us in any place, any time, any circumstance, able to guide us through whatever situation or opportunity comes before us. New life is possible because of that guidance and presence, not just now, but forever. Let’s thank God every day for this wonderful gift. Amen.