



## A disciple in the upper room

Rob Marsh SJ

The gospel reading for the Thursday of Easter week tells us that the disciples were gathered together, hearing about what had happened on the road to Emmaus, when Jesus appeared among them. Rob Marsh SJ finds himself in that group as he imagines the scene: 'I thought by then I'd begun to believe. But seeing him in the flesh – wounds and all – I realised how little I had.'

My life ended that morning. Right about the time he called for something to eat. Although if you'd asked me earlier, I'd have said it ended a few days before when they arrested him. Or, being more honest, when I ran away; ran away and left him and left the others and left my dream of myself behind.

All that was bad enough. Him dead and my life over.

Worse was when the women were saying he wasn't dead. And then Peter and John. And the others. And then daring myself to begin to believe. But even believing, would he want to see me again – coward, fool, traitor that I am?

But then he was with us – doors and walls be damned – and scaring the bejesus out of us. Christ! He has a nerve – creeping up out of nowhere like that and saying: 'Sorry, did I startle you?' Like it was all a big joke.

I thought by then I'd begun to believe. But seeing him in the flesh – wounds and all – I realised how little I had. God! We must have looked a fright because the grin on his face just grew and grew. 'Something wrong, guys? Seen a ghost?'



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Seeing is *not* believing. *I see dead people!* Breathe! And again!

'You got anything to eat? I'm starving!'

There was some leftover fish to push over to him. Hardly hospitable. But he took it and savoured its smell and said the blessing and licked his lips and took a mouthful. And a look of

such bliss took him. And then the fool half choked on a bone – bent over coughing, spluttering, red in the face. And I was with him, holding him, pounding him on the back, panicking lest he choke to death. And *then* my life ended.

Because he was real. He was alive. And as vulnerable as ever and, as ever, beyond restraint. Untouched by crucifixion – no, not untouched – but at risk from a fish bone! And I remember the thought welling up: 'this changes everything'. But more than that I remember the feel of warm flesh under my hands and him standing straight again and wiping the sweat from his brow and the grin again and his arms around me. And I remember laughing, laughing till my guts hurt and my giddy heart danced.

Later, when we'd all settled down, when we'd all had our fill of holding him, and he'd almost had his fill of holding us, and we'd said too much and not enough. Later, he took bread – the way he'd done a lifetime ago – and he gave God thanks and praise and he broke it and he passed it among us. And we held it and tasted it like we'd never tasted bread before. And looked at him. Tasted him. 'This is the bread of new beginnings, my friends. Eat it and never be the same.' Then the cup brimming with the best wine we had. 'This is the lifeblood of the promise between us. Drink it and never be sober again.'

'From this moment,' he said, 'you are my witnesses. My witnesses.'

He was right. Nothing has been the same since. We *have* been his witnesses. Standing up for a truth, certainly – though even then we all said it differently – but deeper, further, truer. Standing up for an experience – no! More even than that. He let us touch him. And we still feel that touch, that weight, that warmth. And through the ages we have given witness with our own flesh. Death is real – look at *our* wounds! – but life is realer still. There is always time for a new beginning. Always a cup of life to share. A forgiveness, a fresh start, a promise kept, a word of peace, a gale of laughter.

We have been witnesses.

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