

Out of the Ordinary

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[0 : 00] There we go. Just cooking my breakfast. That's what I'm having. Sardines. Oh yes. Do you know, I love sardines and I'm the only member of our household that will go anywhere near them.

Come to think of it, my family won't come anywhere near me after I've been eating them. I'm told it does something to my breath. Apparently it seems Tamara doesn't particularly fancy being kissed by a seal. Well, I suppose it's a surefire way of maintaining social distancing, but you know what? I don't care what they say because I know I'm in good company.

According to our Bible reading today, Jesus himself was partial to a bit of the old broiled fish. And I think there's something not insignificant about that. Here's what I think is important about it because whether you like fish or not, in the gospel narratives, there's something about eating fish that simply represents, well, normality. Think about it. We find references to fish coming up all over the gospels. Remember that right up until he went off to Jerusalem, Jesus's life and ministry was lived out in and around Lake Galilee, basically where everyday life was sustained by fishing. Some of the first people whose lives Jesus got involved with were fishermen. Jesus's teaching on occasion took place by the water's edge. It was from a fishing boat that they saw Jesus walking on the water. And it was with just a handful of fish and a bit of bread to go with it that he fed the multitudes. Now, the list goes on. I guess there were inevitably people in and around Galilee who weren't massive fans of fish, although I reckon that they would have been few and far between. But that's not really my point. My point is, is that if you were a first century Galilean, fish wasn't just something you ate. It was more than that. It was something of a representation of ordinary daily life and work. So let's go back to the story in Luke 24. We've got a group of ordinary people in an ordinary place doing an ordinary thing, cooking, cooking fish. And it's right there in the ordinary that the resurrected Jesus appears. It's a scene that captures something of the essence of what the gospel is. You see, you've got the ordinary and then you've got the, well, let's call it what it is.

We've got the strange because let's be honest, the gospel and its claims are rather strange. The resurrection of Jesus is strange. It's not part of our everyday experience that someone is raised from the dead. But that's what lies at the very heart and soul of Christian belief. The claim that God has done something very strange. Right in the midst of our ordinary daily experience, in which we've got used to brokenness, fear, pain, worry, grief, suffering, in that ordinary stuff with which we've become all too familiar, God does something very strange. And he tells us that life won't always be like this. So in this scene, we've got precisely this juxtaposition of the ordinary and the strange. We've got a group of friends cooking together. That's ordinary.

[3 : 45] The risen Jesus appears among them. That's strange. He asks if they've got anything to eat. Now that would be ordinary, but under the circumstances, it's pretty strange. They give him some fish, which he then eats. That's ordinary. But then he goes on to tell them that he's just changed the course of history through his death and resurrection, and that they are now going to form the movement, a.k.a. the church. That movement that will continue to see through that change. That's strange.

Of course, we might write off the Christian message because of its strange nature. But, you know, I think that's too easy and too simplistic. Personally, I find the claims of the Christian gospel so compelling precisely because of its strangeness. I mean, come on, who would ever make that stuff up? And why would you ever make that up and then go on to die for the sake of telling others about it, which was precisely what the first disciples did? C.S. Lewis said this, Reality, in fact, is usually something you could not have guessed. That is one of the reasons I believe in Christianity. If it offered us just the kind of universe we had always expected, I should feel we were making it up. But in fact, it is not the sort of thing anyone would have made up. It just has that queer twist about it that real things have.

In Christ, we have the strange and we have the ordinary. In his resurrection, the strangeness of hope and new life and peace that is way beyond our ordinary understanding bursts into our ordinariness.

My prayer for you right now is that whatever the reality of your ordinariness is, that you will find that strange but real resurrection hope right there in that very place.