

May 17, Ascension Sunday: Luke 24:44-53

Once again we have journeyed through Jesus' death and resurrection—only to be left watching Jesus leave.

by [Theresa Cho](#) in the [May 13, 2015](#) issue

And here we are. It's the last chapter of the Gospel of Luke, in which Jesus meets with the disciples one last time and then ascends to heaven. Once again we have journeyed through the arrest, the trial, the betrayal, the death, and the resurrection—only to be left watching Jesus leave.

What do we witness when we circle back through this journey? That's the task Jesus leaves us with: "You are witnesses of these things." We are invited to look back at Jesus' life and ministry and to recollect the healing of the blind man, the feeding of the 5,000, the outcasts welcomed, the parables told. But surely our task is more than just reciting and remembering the events that have taken place. What are these things that Christ is calling us to witness?

We do receive a clue that in the course of the journey from arrest to resurrection, a change has taken place. Not so much a change in Jesus, but a change in ourselves, "a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins." This change that Jesus speaks of happened in three days. It took three days for sins to be forgiven, for hope to be made eternal, for everything to come to fulfillment.

It doesn't seem like enough time. Sometimes it's taken me more than three days just to complete a sermon. But Jesus says it is more than adequate.

In the fermentation process, it takes up to three days to notice any change. In the Korean church where I grew up, my mom and the other church ladies would make kimchi, gathering around huge bins of napa cabbage and salting each leaf in order to jumpstart the process. This was also a time for them to share news, stories, and prayers. Often you would find them either laughing so hard or weeping so deeply that I'm convinced some of their salty tears made their way into the kimchi.

Once the cabbage had absorbed some of the salt and wilted, they meticulously rubbed each leaf with red pepper spices. Then they packed them in glass jars so that the cabbage could ferment and transform into kimchi, microbes and molecular structure changing right before your eyes.

Kimchi in the early stages of fermentation resembles a crunchy, refreshing, spicy salad. As it continues to ferment, the smell becomes more pungent, the taste more sour, and the ingredients more amalgamated. At a certain point the kimchi becomes so sour or old that it has even been described as smelling like death.

This is when, in my opinion, kimchi is at its best. It's time for kimchi jjigae, a hot and spicy kimchi stew. What was once a cabbage side dish resurrects as a super comfort food. And it has to be made with old kimchi. New kimchi hasn't changed enough to provide the full, rich flavor that kimchi jjigae demands.

The fermentation process Jesus leads us through began with his birth, when we were rubbed with the frankincense of hope, packed with the myrrh of immense love, and left to ferment with the knowledge that our identity and our relationship with God were about to change. Through the ministry of Jesus Christ—every miracle, teaching, healing, and sharing of bread—we find ourselves changing, right down to our hearts, our microbes, and our molecular structure. We are fermenting. The odor is in the air. When it smells like death, we find new life.

Before Jesus ascends to heaven, he has a meal with his disciples—not once but twice. First he breaks bread with Cleopas and another follower at Emmaus, and then again with the disciples in Jerusalem. Jesus reveals himself and invites them to look at his hands and feet, to touch them. Why do we always find Jesus having a meal with his disciples?

When my mom began teaching me how to cook, she always said that the first step is eating. Eat the food. Let the flavors and the taste become a part of you. Eating my mom's cooking was more than learning how to cook; it was also a way of understanding my mom. She poured so much of herself into her cooking. If you know how to eat and know how food should taste, then you are ready to begin cooking that food for others.

"I'm sending to you what my Father promised," says Jesus, "but you are to stay in the city until you have been furnished with heavenly power." It's almost as if Jesus is saying, "Stay, eat, and taste until you are ready to cook and share a meal with

others.”

Kimchi jjigae is not meant to be eaten alone. It is made in a huge pot and placed in the center of the table. The people gather around the table with their individual bowls of rice and dip their spoons into the communal pot of fermented goodness. In this week’s Gospel reading, we find the disciples in the first steps of cooking, but a time is coming soon when they will be called to witness—to cook for themselves and to feed others.

Our task is to eat, taste, and dissect the flavors that we savor in the pot, so that we may come to understand the chef. By letting the taste sink in and challenge our taste buds, we discover flavors we never knew before. We give in to the fermentation process, to allow our hearts to be changed and our lives to be transformed so that we may share this meal with others—others who are not able to physically touch Jesus’ hands and feet but are able to taste and share in the meal.

I have to admit: I still cannot cook Korean food very well. But I keep trying.