

There is a story about a boy named Teddy Stollard written by Dale Galloway that illustrates how truth is not always something we see with our eyes, but when our hearts are guided by the Risen Christ. If you are familiar with this lovely story, please be patient, as it is a good one to hear again.

Teddy Stollard was the kind of little boy who wasn't popular or liked by his classmates or teachers at school. He slouched in his seat, never raised his hand in class and had a constant expression of boredom or distraction on his face. When called on, he mumbled a one-word response. The clothes he wore didn't fit right, and looked like they hadn't been properly laundered. He badly needed a haircut and smelled like he needed a bath. He was no teacher's favorite student.

However, if his teachers had read his school records, they might have been able to see beyond his appearance and recognize a deeper truth. The summary of his first-grade year read, "Teddy is a good boy and shows promise, but has a poor home situation." His second-grade report said, "Teddy is quiet and withdrawn. His mother is terminally ill." By third grade his report said, "Teddy is falling behind. His mother died this year, his father is uninvolved." And by fourth grade his report sadly said, "Teddy is hopelessly backward. His father has moved away; Teddy is living with an aunt. He is deeply troubled."

The Christmas of his fifth-grade year, Teddy brought a gift for his teacher. Unlike his classmates, however, his gift was wrapped in plain brown paper instead of something festive. His teacher, Miss Thompson, opened each present one at a time as part of the class celebration. When she opened Teddy's gift, she found a rhinestone bracelet with several stones missing, and a bottle of perfume that was almost empty. When the children started to laugh, Miss Thompson did something remarkably loving. She put on the bracelet commenting, "Isn't it beautiful? And this perfume smells so good!"

As the children were leaving, Teddy approached her and said, "I'm glad you liked my gifts, Miss Thompson. All day you smelled like my mother and her bracelet looks good on you." After he left, Miss Thompson wept. She wept with grief for a little boy without a mother or father. She wept for her failure to recognize a fellow human being in pain, and she prayed for forgiveness. After that, Miss Thompson was different, she was a new teacher. She tutored Teddy and all the children who needed a little extra help. By the end of the year, Teddy had caught up with his classwork and was even ahead of a few of his classmates in some subjects. After he moved on to the next grade and a new academic year, Miss Thompson didn't hear from him until the year she got a note that

said, “Dear Miss Thompson, I wanted you to be the first to know I am graduating from high school and am second in my class. Love, Teddy Stollard.” Four years later she got another note that said, “Dear Miss Thompson, I wanted you to be the first to know I am graduating first in my class. University has not been easy, but I liked it. Love, Teddy Stollard.” Four years after that, Miss Thompson got one last note, it read: “Dear Miss Thompson, I wanted you to be the first to know that as of today I am Theodore J. Stollard, M.D. How about that? I want you to come and sit where my mother would have sat, because you are the nearest thing to family that I’ve had. Love, Teddy Stollard.”

In today’s Gospel, two of Jesus’ disciples met the Risen Christ in the midst of their grief. This lovely story of the two disciples sharing the pain and confusion of their grief with the Risen Christ, whom they didn’t recognize, is not much different from the story of Teddy Stollard in that it reveals the powerful truth of resurrection life. One of the common elements in Biblical encounters with the Risen Jesus is even those closest to him do not recognize him when they first meet him. It isn’t until the Risen Jesus does something or says something they can connect with, like when he spoke Mary Magdalene’s name or when he broke bread like he did at the Last Supper that they are able to recognize him.

Perhaps this indicates a difference between the historical Jesus and the Risen Christ, who has died, gone through death, and emerged through it to the other side. It is the Risen Christ who can meet us in our pain, sorrow, and grief and help us through it to the other side where we can encounter new life. This new life doesn’t negate what was lost, but somehow tenderly transforms it into the love of God that God’s Kingdom is made of.

In today’s Gospel we saw this happen when the Risen Christ listened to all the events the disciples thought they understood and then tenderly, gently, broke them open to reveal something deeper they hadn’t realized, a truth they had missed. A truth they still didn’t recognize until the Risen Christ broke bread, and, like it says in the opening prayer or anthem in the Burial Service in *The Book of Common Prayer*, “I myself shall see, and my eyes behold him who is my friend, and not a stranger.” Then the disciples, like Miss Thompson, changed, they became new disciples like she became a new teacher, and returned to the others to proclaim the Lord is risen indeed.

The story of Teddy Stollard may be fictional, but there are so many real stories like it, and it shows that encounters with resurrection life aren’t just for the Bible. They can and do happen in our real lives. The Risen Christ can and does continue to meet us in our moments of grief and can receive that grief with love that will guide us to other side. It is a journey that may take some time, but it is worth it. When we share our grief with the Risen Christ, he can and will take what we think we know and tenderly, gently, break

it open to reveal the deeper truth that God's love has been with us the whole time, and is how all of us whether we are teachers, students, professors, musicians, lawyers, doctors, caretakers, artists, maintenance workers, administrators, military professionals, baristas, IT professionals, nurses, entertainers, dentists, therapists, priests, parents, and even children can grow deeper into God's Kingdom come to earth through the resurrection of Christ. Alleluia.