

“When Did Your Life Begin?”

John 14: 15-21, Psalm 66: 8-20

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Most of us remember August 14, 1945 because that is the day World War 2 ended. John Dapper and Lyman Hallowell remember that date because it is the day they met. John was a set designer and Lyman was a film editor, and they met in Hollywood at Fox studios. When everyone was let out of work early to go celebrate the end of the war, they ended up at a car hop together with their friends, and hit it off. John invited Lyman to a dinner party he was hosting that night, and that was the beginning of the rest of their lives.

They quickly fell in love, and two months later, they moved in together. This was in 1945. They never came out to their family or to many of their friends. Their relationship was their own; it was private out of necessity. For most of their life they made sure when they were in public that they didn't touch or show too much affection for one another. They carefully balanced and protected their life so that when Hollywood blacklisted people in the McCarthy era they weren't effected. By the time the Stonewall riots happened in New York and the gay rights movement was launched in the 1970s, they were already in their fifties and they were still in love.

They were partners in everything. They describe their relationship by saying they live for one another. They are constant companions and still very loving. Today they walk down the street hand in hand, each with a cane in their other hand. In 2008, they got married in California during the short time gay marriage was legal, and last year they

celebrated their 65th anniversary. I recently saw a documentary about their love story, and I was incredibly touched. There was one line that has continued to stay with me. John said, “Life didn't really begin until we met.”

That's such a powerful statement. Life didn't really begin until we met. That's what it means when you encounter love that moves your mind, body, and soul. I think that statement holds true for a lot more than romantic love, although that is certainly incredibly powerful. I think that statement can be said for familial love or passion for something you do. For some, life might not have really began until they held their first child in their arms. Life didn't really begin until they started working for Habitat for Humanity or joining the Peace Corps. Life didn't really begin until they embraced their community and found ways to serve others. Life didn't really begin until you understand that you are not the center of the universe, but you are an extension of all the living things around you—people, plants, and animals. Life didn't really begin until you saw yourself in the eyes of someone else and until you appreciated the vast diversity of our world and valued your place in it. Life didn't really begin until you began to love what you do have instead of what you don't have.

Life didn't really begin until you first encountered God. It's how I think about faith. You don't come to understand what it means to have faith in God by reading a book. Reading a book can help you understand or contextualize your experience of God and illuminate other people's relationships with God, but you have to first feel it and experience it and witness it in your life to really believe. You have to encounter God for yourself to fully understand who and what God is. Then, when that happens, you might find yourself saying that life didn't really begin until you met God.

When Jesus' disciples encountered him for the first time, their lives began. They understood that because of Jesus, things would never be the same. They gave up their homes and their families and their jobs and their hobbies and they left to follow Jesus, to learn from him and to experience God in the flesh. That is when their life began and when they found their purpose.

If that experience ended when Jesus died and people were no longer able to actually walk alongside Jesus, we would not be here today. There would be no such thing as a Christian or as South Church. If the experience of knowing Jesus ended when he died, there would not be enough momentum to maintain the faith of millions of believers, skeptics, and hopefuls over two thousand years. Jesus, clued in to the greater mystery of God's divinity, knew this. He knew that the power of God rested in being able to experience God firsthand. He knew that the mere thought of Jesus not being around shook the core of his followers so he gave them a preview of what was to follow him. He tells them the Spirit of truth will be with them forever. This is a Parakletos, the Greek word, an Advocate for God. Not an advocate for us to God so that God won't forget about us. God is greater than that. It is an advocate for God: an advocate to make us all aware of God's presence in our lives. Something that will remind us that God is working among us and that because God chooses life and love over death and hate, we must live and love with our whole selves. We can still experience God in all that we do and in everyone person we meet.

The Holy Spirit is the advocate that is with us. The Holy Spirit is different from Jesus, but connecting him and God with us, the people who are still trying to figure out what this all means. This is what allows us to feel and experience God as strongly as the

disciples who walked alongside Jesus did. The Spirit moves through us, reminding us, “Christ was resurrected, Christ lives, God is with us!” Life triumphed over death and so we here! Together! Come, experience god and your life will never be the same.” This is an awesome gift. To me, the Holy Spirit is the gift of faith. It moves God from memorizing Bible stories of long ago people to understanding in our bones how those people felt when God came to them in a burning bush or promised them a family or gave them the power and responsibility of prophecy.

This is the Easter promise and this is why we celebrate Easter for a whole season, not just one Sunday. The Holy Spirit is a part of the promise Jesus makes when he says, “I will not leave you orphaned.” You will not stop knowing God as a confidant and a teacher. You will not be abandoned in your darkest hour. Another will be with you: an advocate, a guide, a Holy Spirit. Living and breathing into us all, allowing us to experience God and helping us understand that Christ lives, that all we do is transformed by God's spirit.

The first time my life really began was when I learned how to make scrambled eggs. I was in 5th grade and my mom had started to teach me how to cook. Scrambled eggs were my first really complicated recipe. After cracking the eggs, we poured them in a jar with milk because my mom had a hunch that whisking would involve eggs a la countertop, not scrambled eggs. I shook the jar until they were mixed together, and slowly poured them in the pan. I watched, amazed and mystified, as the liquid transformed into fluffy eggs! It actually worked! What might be a small moment for someone else, opened up my world. I didn't understand food chemistry or how that was possible, but my passion awoke with being trusted to create such magic. My passion for

cooking and creating and concocting in the kitchen began and changed the way I even still think about food. I met God in the kitchen and God said, "This tastes good." No I'm kidding. Through scrambled eggs, God taught me to value food and where it comes from and how it is transformed before it makes it way to my plate. There have been many times since then that my life first began, like when I traveled abroad for the first time and when I decided to go to seminary and then began working in a church , but that memory from my childhood is when I remember thinking for the first time that my life really began and that God was present with me.

What about you? What was the day life really began? When you first encountered God was it in another person, in scrambled eggs, or in something else entirely? When did you really begin to live?