

While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. (Luke 24:41)

“The Never-Ending Easter Dinner”

As we are beginning to officially gather or perhaps you have already begun to gathered again for meals that we often share around holidays like Easter, many of us are taking time to truly reflect and embrace the meaning of these long-forgotten events of the season. At Easter meals, we remember sacrifice, redemption, and hope, giving thanks for the salvation that is freely offered. We often say a prayer. (SLIDE #1)

However, sometimes these prayers can seem routine, with little connection to our lives. But prayer can be more than a gateway to a meal. It reminds us that at the center of who we are is something sacred. That sacred thing is not just an excuse for eating together, although that is nice. The sacredness is what give us value, it’s what sustains us, provides for us, and directs our life toward justice and peace.

(SLIDE #2) I have to admit that I would be hard-pressed to choose one of the many post-resurrection appearances of Christ as my favorite. Each one recorded in Scripture is so full of vivid imagery and meaning that it would be nearly impossible to put one above another. Yet, having said that, I also have to admit an especial fondness for the one described here in our Gospel Reading by Luke.

There are two things about this passage that I really like. First, Luke’s comment that the disciples “in their joy were disbelieving.” It’s such a great description of what their amazement must have been; it calls to my mind some of the great, little-used emotional descriptors of our language: consternation (anxiety), bewilderment, perplexity, astonishment, and (my favorite) stupefaction (bafflement). I think that’s what Luke is saying in this delightful incomprehensible phrase; that the disciples were stupefied! It’s also Luke’s way of describing something that is handled somewhat more harshly in Mark’s telling of the story. Mark, with typical economy of expression, describes the scene this way:

“Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.” (Mark 16:14)

When we read these two texts together, (SLIDE #3) describing this scene in their different ways, we get such a wonderful picture of the apostles. Astonished but still making excuses, perplexed but still making demands, stupefied but still relativizing the situation - these men aren’t just First Century Palestinian Jewish fisherman; they are 21st Century Americans; they are us!

The second thing I find absolutely delightful about Luke’s telling of this reappearance of Jesus, is his question to the disciples: “Have you anything here to eat?”

Jesus said: “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet, then, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Luke 24:38-43

If this scene were set in a modern home, I think we could envision it happening in the kitchen, the apostles sitting around the kitchen table, Jesus showing up, saying “Hey!” then going to the refrigerator, opening the door, and looking in like a teenager getting home from school, “Anything here to eat?” They do, as this version of Luke tells us. They have that broiled fish handy, and in the King James Version (supported by some ancient manuscripts) Luke also reports that they gave him a piece of honeycomb.

There is a long line of biblical scholarship that tells us that Jesus’ asking for something to eat, and then actually eating it, is his way of proving to the bewildered disciples that he’s not a phantom. The idea is that by consuming it in front

of them, Jesus proves that he has not returned as a spirit, or a ghost, or some sort of apparition; a ghost, after all, could not be touched, or have an appetite, or eat things. It may be Luke's way of saying: 'Ghost? Did you ever see a ghost chew? Did you ever see a ghost swallow? Did you ever see a ghost digest? Well, did you?'"

I also prefer this version because it includes the honeycomb (SLIDE #4) This makes Jesus' eating much more than a mere demonstration of non-ghost-ness; it makes it a meal. Something savory, and something sweet; an entree and a dessert. This is not just a "Look; see, I'm not a spirit". This is Jesus once again sitting down at the dinner table with his friends, just like he had done in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, just like he did once before in this upper room, just like he did with Cleopas and his companion in the inn on the road to Emmaus. This is the community once again sitting together at the kitchen table. And just like every family, every community at every dinner table, they are talking and discussing and maybe even getting a little irritable with one another if that additional bit to Mark's Gospel is trustworthy.

Martin is from a city in the suburb of San Francisco, San Mateo. A favorite restaurant in San Francisco called Credo, (SLIDE #5) is located there. Credo is simply the Latin word for "creed". On the restaurant's walls are painted quotations from all sorts of philosophers, writers, politicians, and so forth. On their menus they have their business credo written out:

At Credo, we believe in nourishing both the body and the mind. Our walls depict the universality of ideas, the clash of conflicting viewpoints and the democratic nature of discussion and debate. We believe that good food and good company go hand-in-hand. We believe in the time-honored tradition of the dinner table debate and the value of impassioned points of view. We believe simple things can be wonderful, like authentic ingredients, genuine creativity and gracious hospitality.

This is what is happening here at this ancient **Never-Ending Easter Dinner** table - debate, impassioned points of view, genuine creativity, and gracious hospitality. This is the glory and power of Christ's Resurrection; the creation of community, a new beloved community.

This is why I like this story and how Luke and Mark tell it from different perspectives; it is such a clear vision of the resurrected community. In the very human act of eating a meal, in the very human condition of perplexity and befuddlement, in the very human process of making excuses and making demands, these eleven, once a dispirited and possibly dying community, are resurrected. These are not simply individuals on a personal spiritual quest; they are joined together into a new community in Christ, crucified with him, now risen with him, given new life and new purpose and new mission because of his resurrection.

This new community is an on-going one, a growing one, a maturing one. As apostle John says in his first letter: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. What we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is." (1 John 3:1-2)

We do know this: that his eating the fish and the honeycomb revealed him to be a real human being and that that is what we are called to be – real human beings. Carroll Simcox, editor of the Episcopal Church magazine put it this way:

You and I shall be our real, complete selves for the first time ever. We think of ourselves now as human beings. We really aren't that, not yet. **We are human becomings.** The fetus conceived only yesterday is a human becoming. If you are living in Christ, believing in him and trying to follow and obey him as the master of your life, you are by his grace, becoming ever more and more like Jesus. (Quoted by Guy Sayle, *infra*)

But John does not mean that God is making us into clones or exact replicas of Jesus of Nazareth. The wonderful paradox of the Christian faith is that the more we become like Jesus, the more we become our truest selves. The hope

of the Christian faith is that we can become as truly human as the Resurrected Christ. As we discover deeper dimensions of Christ-likeness, we uncover more and more of our honest-to-God selves. Jesus is the pattern and the power, the model and the source, of authentic human life. (SLIDE #5) We are meant to have what he had and has:

- a radical and liberating faith in God;
- a childlike trust in the grace of God;
- a trembling wonder before the mystery of life;
- a durable hope that, because we are in God's hands, death and sorrow and pain and tears are not the end, but joy and wholeness and laughter are;
- an astonishing confidence that we and the world are headed, not toward midnight, but toward sunrise
- an undimmed awareness that the heart of all things is unconditional and compassionate love.

Those eleven disciples sitting around that dinner table, confronted by what they at first thought was an apparition, were astonished but still making excuses, perplexed but still making demands, bewildered but still relativizing the situation. They were just like us, but as church history and the Book of Acts shows in stories like the one we heard today, they became like him, they became their truest selves, and so shall we all.

That is the power and promise of the Resurrection. (SLIDE #6) That's the power and promise of the **Never-Ending Easter Dinner!** Alleluia & Amen!