

## RESURRECTION PROCLAIMED IN A MEAL

3 Easter – B

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*Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 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. Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." Luke 24:36b-48*

The discovery of Easter continues. Just two weeks ago we celebrated Jesus' resurrection, and we're still hearing stories of Jesus' appearances and encountering faithful followers who are flabbergasted.

News that significantly changes your life will leave you stunned. To be sure, I know that feeling when *terrible* things have happened in my life. And, I know most all of you can relate to those feelings. The shock and disbelief of an illness, a death, or another great loss, leave you paralyzed.

Jesus' friends had to feel that way after his death. And after stories of his being raised, they were, no doubt, still walking around in a daze of what had just happened...too stunned to comprehend the idea of Jesus being alive.

Every now and then I buy a few lottery tickets. Realistically, I know that I don't stand a chance of winning very much, but I can justify the purchase with the idea that at least some small part our lottery money goes toward NC schools; plus, if I would win, think of all the good I could do with a Powerball jackpot!

Of course, if I did happen to win big, I might die from the shock. Or, more likely, I would be walking around in a daze of shock and disbelief, joy, and perhaps even some fear. Good news that is *that* good would likely leave me with about the same kind of out-of-body experience you have when you've been delivered shocking *bad* news. Or like when you wake up and have to tell yourself that dream (or nightmare) wasn't real.

Both bad and good news can put us into that state of shock and confusion with a surreal feeling that our life has suddenly gone out of control, and our future is forever changed.

For Jesus' friends, what was bad news suddenly transformed into unbelievable, joyful news; but the shock leaves them stunned and confused. What could never be real has become real, and their lives and futures are forever changed. A lot of emotions and concerns come into play. First, the excitement. Jesus is alive! Then, the questions: What will we do and how will live in this new reality?

In our gospel reading today, it appears that Jesus' answer is not to perform magic (as if rising from the dead weren't enough!), but to do something ordinary and familiar. "Do you have anything here to eat?" Jesus asks.

That's probably the last thing the disciples expected to hear. But, "[t]hey gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence." If they had any trouble believing Jesus was

alive, this was surely a way to show them. Not only do they see and believe, but Jesus and his friends are reunited in the action of a meal. Doing this “normal” thing brings comfort in the time of confusion and wonder. Families get together around a table. And in the church, we celebrate, we interact, we seek and bring comfort through the actions of eating and drinking, in fellowship and in worship. Central to our being church is celebrating and commemorating our Lord’s death and rising as we gather around the table. The meal makes it real.

Jesus once described the kingdom of heaven as a great feast. He shared in a meal with his disciples just before his death. Right before this passage in Luke’s gospel, when he appears to friends on the road to Emmaus, he is made known in the breaking of the bread. And today’s account shows us the risen Jesus is real when he eats a piece of fish in their midst.

The meal makes it real. To once again see Jesus *eating* brings a sense of “normal” about him. It takes the edge off of the mystery of “How can this be possible?” and moves us to: “It’s real. Just look! There he is, eating.” With each movement in the gospel, the story becomes more concrete. What at first appears as a trivial note by Luke (Jesus asking for something to eat) actually offers us more evidence, more testimony, and greater zeal for sharing the story. Luke wants us to know: He eats; therefore he is very much alive. Believe it!

There’s little wonder, then, that we keep the story alive and personal through breaking bread and drinking wine. One of my seminary professors, Walt Bouman, staked the very church’s proclamation on eating and drinking—that is to say: In order to be the church, we must do the meal.\*

The meal makes it real. When we come together around the Lord’s Table, we believe and proclaim that Christ is *truly present* in the gifts of bread and wine. This is not simply a re-enactment of the Last Supper, but a way of binding ourselves to the Risen Christ.

And meals do bind us, don’t they? Whether it be Holy Communion at the altar, celebrating a holiday, gathering to honor one of our friends, or simply grabbing coffee and cookies after worship. Each meal helps to bind the people of our congregation as members of a family helping us remember that we *are* the body of Christ.

So, while there is a lot of symbolism in today’s text about Jesus eating with his disciples, what counts is what we do with this story now—from this point forward. In his final sermon to the seminary community before his death, Dr. Bouman wrote about the meal (Holy Communion/The Eucharist) as the church’s sending (our mission): “In the meal [Jesus] takes us up into his offering and makes us his body for the world. In the Eucharist we experience that there is more to do with our lives than to protect them. We are set free to offer them.”

Perhaps so many things in Jesus’ life and ministry happened around meals because it would be in a meal that we most visibly and regularly remember him and recall who we are called to be, and how Jesus sets us free in order that we might serve him as we offer ourselves in service to others.

Meals show hospitality and acceptance. They nourish and celebrate. They console and comfort. And they give us a sense of hope for the days to come. Through the meal we come to know one another better. And that sounds a lot like who Jesus is asking us to be, as we share good news, resurrection news, with the world. Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen, indeed, Alleluia!

\* An example of Dr. Bouman’s theology on Holy Communion can be found at: “Identity and Witness: Liturgy and the Mission of the Church” lecture at Valparaiso University by Walter R. Bouman, 1989. Transcript accessed at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/>