

Sermon on Luke 24:36-48
Third Sunday of Easter, April 19, 2015
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
By James Erlandson

Today in our gospel lesson we hear Jesus quoting the phrase heard most often today by parents when teenaged children, young adults, or spouses come home after school or after work, stick their head in the refrigerator and call out for everyone to hear: “*Do you have anything here to eat?*” If you are a young person or a spouse who has said this before, I’ll bet you didn’t know that you were quoting scripture – and most importantly, Jesus! Although I think you probably have more selfish reasons for asking this: like feeding your face, and being too lazy to make it or find it yourself! Jesus was making a point to show his disciples that he had indeed risen, and was not a ghost (for ghosts do not eat solid food)!

It is striking to think about how often Jesus talks about food in the gospels, or uses food to make a point about God and the Christian community. I didn’t have time to count the times Jesus refers to food (I’m sure somebody has!), but it happens quite frequently. Jesus’ first miracle in John’s gospel is changing water into wine (not technically food) – but it happened at a wedding banquet, where I’m sure there was plenty of food. Jesus ate at the homes of sinners, tax collectors and Pharisees, as well as the homes of his disciples (and Peter’s mother-in-law, whom Jesus healed so that she could serve them food). He sent his disciples into the fields to eat the seeds from the wheat being grown (and so be accused of working on the Sabbath by the Pharisees). He fed 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish, in order to give a lesson in the miracle of sharing – if we work together and share what we have, there will always be enough! He gathered his disciples for a “last supper” where he washed their feet in an unforgettable lesson about service to each other, and then passed out bread and wine to be distributed always in memory of his sacrifice - his body and blood – to give the whole world life! He told Peter and his disciples after he had risen to “*feed my sheep*” – which probably wasn’t about food, but a figure of speech in order to stress how important it was for his disciples – and all his followers – to give everyone who follows Jesus the nourishment they need for body and the soul.

So, what’s going on in this lesson today from Luke? The setting was that upper room in Jerusalem again, on Easter evening. The disciples were once again gathered in fear, in the evening after dark, on the same day that they had heard the disturbing story from the women disciples (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James) that they had not found Jesus’ body in the tomb where he had been buried. Jesus was nowhere to be found! Then two of disciples, one of them named Cleopas, burst into the room, out of breath from running several miles, that

that had seen Jesus “in the breaking of the bread” at their house in Emmaus! “The Lord was indeed risen, and he has appeared to Simon!” they said. No sooner had they said this than Jesus himself stood among them and said, “*Peace be with you!*” Their response was noteworthy: They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost! No one rejoiced yet, or said “Greetings, Lord!” They were just plain scared! So Jesus asked 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 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 to eat?*” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

So for anyone who doubts, you are, we all are in good company. Even in their joy at seeing Jesus, they were disbelieving and wondering. Which means that “doubt” is not the *opposite* of faith, but rather, the accompaniment to faith – it’s “flip side”. When the disciples were gathered, the original band of “the faithful”, they were filled with doubts *even when the risen Jesus was standing right there among them!* When Jesus had appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus and walked with them on their way home, they had no idea who he was – because they didn’t expect him there. Jesus said, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!” So doubts and fear were mingled in among the faith and joy expressed by the disciples when they did learn who this person was – their risen Lord. Why shouldn’t fear and doubt be just as strongly mixed in with our faith and joy today, 2000 years later? Faith and doubt are just two different sides to the same coin.

For faith is not the absence of doubt, just as doubt doesn’t mean that you don’t have any faith! Doubt and fear are those natural human responses which come from our survival instinct and our questioning minds, which arise whenever something new happens, which is outside the realm of our experience. I think the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is one of those things! Faith is actually the hope and joy we feel in the midst of things we cannot understand, which we cannot prove (like the resurrection) – despite the lack of evidence! If hope were certain, it wouldn’t be hope, after all! But faith and hope are much stronger than mere “wishful thinking”, because they are based on trust in a person, Jesus, and in God, whom we believe has acted in order to do such marvelous things – which are so contrary to our human experience in this world!

But here’s the real miraculous thing! The good news of the resurrection – that Jesus has risen – comes with an equally miraculous promise: *that you and I will also rise again to new life, when Jesus comes again!* What? Say that again? Jesus has promised that you and I, and all who have died in the Lord, will rise

again, when Jesus comes again. Death and tears will be no more! This news has ALWAYS elicited doubts and fears, even ridicule from those outside this faith, who cannot relate to the hope that we have. This will always be.

However, the good news of the resurrection (of Jesus and the promise of our own) has also always resulted in changed lives, in forgiveness received, in new hope, in the transformation of peoples' lives and of whole societies! The doubts are still there, along with the disbelief – our own, as well as those who don't share our faith. But with hope, it is enough for us to begin to see a change in our lives, starting with the smallest of personal actions, and on to the changing of whole communities and societies, in movements based on faith in Jesus' promises.

And to symbolize this, to make it “real”, Jesus always comes back to food! Yes, he asked for something to eat, in order to show his disciples that he was indeed flesh and blood, and not a ghost! So we share a holy eucharist, a “feast of joy”, at the Lord's Table where Jesus is our host and inviter. As Jesus instructed us, we take a piece of bread and a cup of wine, hold it up and say “this is Jesus' body, this is Christ's blood – given and shed for you. Eat and drink, in remembrance of him.” So we literally eat and drink this bread and wine, to help us to remember that Jesus is, indeed flesh and blood, he is real, and we can feel him and “taste” him among us – even if this is, still, actually bread and wine that we eat!

Then we go on to follow other instructions: like “feed my sheep”. We continue today to read the scriptures together, to remember the stories told and the lessons taught by Jesus himself, so that we can follow them. We nourish and care for one another, and serve each other – just as Jesus served us, and washed the feet of his disciples. And most literally, WE FEED EACH OTHER! Not only in coffee hours and congregation fellowship meals, where we eat with each other, socialize, and build community here. We also invite others who need real food to eat, and feed them. We hosted Project Home families last month in March, and actually fed them an evening meal and a breakfast every day. We contribute food and finances for our local foodshelf at the Hallie Q. Brown community center, to help local families have enough to eat. We have invited our neighbors from Dale Street Place to eat meals with us in the past, and we will again in the future. Today after worship we will meet to consider a proposal to be a Loaves and Fishes partner, to be the place where community families are literally fed five nights a week, in partnership with other congregations. All these are ways that we can act to feed one another, to share a loaf of bread when we see our neighbors are hungry, and to actually EAT WITH THEM as well – to be in relationship, which can only happen in a meal, when we eat together! This is ministry, SHARING FOOD IS MINISTRY – it is the greatest, most literal, sign of hospitality that we have as human beings. Food crosses all cultural and language barriers: for everybody eats! So I ask Jesus' question once again: “*Do you have anything here to eat?*” Amen.