

Third Weekend of Easter (B/RCL)
Luke 24.36b-48
April 25-26, 2009
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

“How can you think about food at a time like this??” Have you ever said it? Have you ever had it said **to** you? A woman’s been in labor for hours, unable to eat anything but ice chips, and her husband says, “Honey, I’m gonna step out for a few minutes to get a snack.” That’s got to qualify as one of those, “If looks could kill” moments ☺. Or how about the friend or date who leaves a suspense-filled movie right in the middle, to get another bucket of popcorn or box of Jujubes? [Whispered:] “How can you think about food at a time like this??” Or on a more serious note, when families have experienced a death, one person is often more concerned than all the others put together about what’s going to be on the menu for the funeral luncheon. The rest of the group may be feeling more and more silently exasperated until somebody finally asks, “How can you think about food at a time like this??”

Well, it looks like they’re in good company, because Jesus does! In today’s Gospel, the Lord is seeing His disciples for the first time since He died and rose, and in the middle of that emotional reunion He says, “Have you anything here to eat?” (Luke 24.41)

In all four Gospels, it’s pretty clear that Jesus enjoyed a good meal. One of the first criticisms leveled at Him by the religious leaders was the claim that He was “a glutton and a drunkard!” (Luke 7.34) We don’t say that about people who don’t appreciate good food and drink. And do you remember when Jesus raised that little girl, the daughter of Jairus, from the dead? He said to her, “Child, get up!” (Luke 8.45) She did, and Jesus immediately “...directed [the parents] to give her something to eat” (Luke 8.55). Again with the food!

Earlier the same day that the risen Lord made this surprise visit to His disciples, He’d been on the road to Emmaus with two other friends/followers. They walked with Him and spoke to Him for a long time without recognizing that their travel companion was Jesus Himself.

Maybe they knew His identity deep inside, though, because they made Him an offer He couldn't refuse: to join them for dinner. The description of what happened next will be familiar to many of you:

When he was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.... [H]e had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. (Luke 24.30-31, 35)

Jesus had bread for dinner in Emmaus, and fish for dessert in Jerusalem, because that's what His fishermen friends gave Him when He asked, "Have you anything here to eat?" Bread and fish: they call to mind an earlier miracle in Galilee, when Jesus took five loaves and two fish and fed 5,000 people, with 12 baskets of leftovers. (See Luke 9.10-17.)

"How can you think about food at a time like this??" Isn't the truth that we're almost **always** thinking about food? People often show love by giving the gift of food. You all know someone like that, past or present: the relative, neighbor, friend, whose primary way of showing he or she cares is cooking or baking for you, or feeding you in some other way, like heading to Boston Market or Eloise's or the Squan to get you tasty take-out. Hopefully we all have happy food memories. I remember my grandma making me tea and honey when I was little and had a cold. I never liked the taste, but I loved the attention and honey gives me warm fuzzies to this day. Right after 9/11 I made an apple pie and sent a piece to a teacher friend who was sick with worry because her husband was a NYC cop who had been on duty, away from home, for over a week. You would have thought I sent her pheasant under glass....

Our bodies need **fuel** and our spirits need **fellowship**, the fellowship of *companions*, who literally are the folks with whom we share bread. Jesus asked about food in today's Gospel, though, not because He had an attack of the munchies, but because He wanted to show the fact that He was **not** a ghost, but really was the risen Lord, whose body was flesh not ghostly vapor, and who could eat as hearty a meal as any of us. Jesus had **really** died and had **really** risen and

was **really** present to His friends. His death was life for us, because it bought forgiveness for all our sins.

In the feeding of the 5,000 and the Last Supper, Jesus fed both friend and stranger. In today's Gospel, His disciples fed **Him**, first bread, then fish. In the Sacrament of Holy Communion, Jesus feeds **us**. He gives us heavenly **fuel**, the Lord's Body and Blood; He gives us joyful **fellowship** with God and with our brothers and sisters in Christ; He gives us **forgiveness** of sins, life and salvation. This is why we come to the Table and keep returning: because there is no more nourishing food, no holier communion with God or neighbor, no greater source of strength, no surer font of forgiveness, no better antidote for sickness or sadness, no more delicious or healthier meal in all the world.

Having been fed by God's hand, we're sent out to feed the world. Sharing in Christ's Body, we **become** Christ's Body: Christ's eyes to look upon the world with love, Christ's hands to serve, Christ's arms to embrace, Christ's mouth to share Good News, Christ's feet to travel wherever we may become an answer to someone's prayer.

Christ is no longer physically, bodily present here, to convince people He is risen by showing them the wounds in His hands and feet, or by pulling up a chair beside them and chowing down. The only visible, tangible proof that Christ is alive, "risen indeed, alleluia!" is proof of self-sacrificing love alive and well in His followers' lives. Someone has said that we are the only Bible some people will ever "read." Let's let the message our lives send be one of God's great and loving mercy in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The next time someone says, "How can you be hungry at a time like this??" whatever the particular "time" is that they're referring to, remember that meal for **all** seasons of the year, **all** seasons of the heart, this Holy Communion, our sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ. It is a **very special** meal, but it is also meant to be a **frequent** one. It is **priceless**, but **free** of cost. It is, as Martin Luther said,

“a means whereby Christ holds his little flock together,”
“a comfort for the sorrowing,
a healing for the sick,
life for the dying,
food for the hungry,
and a rich treasure for all the poor and needy.”

Eat! Drink! Be glad!

Amen.

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham