

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Acts 3:12-19

Psalm 4

1 John 3:1-7

Luke 24:36-48

April 18, 2021

The Third Sunday of Easter

*Have you anything to eat?*

This may be one of my favorite questions that Jesus ever asks. It reminds me of the daily question from the kids...*what's for dinner?* At times, that question comes at 5pm right when they get home. But at other times, it comes as early as 6am...right when they wake up...or via text from school in the middle of the day. What's for dinner? It's as though the entire day is built around this one moment of eating...sitting together around a table, picking up bread, tasting the soup, drinking tall glasses of water. It's the feeling of being home, of being secure and loved and nourished. It feels good to know what's for dinner.

Have you anything to eat? It brings up an important question not only for Jesus, but for his disciples, and for us. Soon after he asks the question, the disciples give him a piece of broiled fish and Jesus eats it right in front of them. I love that we are given those details. Jesus lets them see each bite of that broiled fish...his hands move from plate to mouth. He consumes the fish piece by piece...maybe he lets out a sigh of contentment. Maybe he drinks some wine.

The disciples watch and witness this meal in amazement. Their beloved Jesus, returned from the grave...sitting there in the flesh and of all things eating and drinking as though it was the most normal thing in the whole wide world.

It was that moment of the mundane yet miraculous when their minds were opened. It was within the physical moments of simply gathering at table that they began to truly see. Yes, Jesus, says...you are now witnesses of these things.

But, witnesses to what exactly? Witnesses to a crazy, unexpected, unprecedented, unbelievable bodily resurrection? Witnesses to a meal they thought they would never have again? Witnesses to Jesus talking and laughing among them?

All of that is true but what *purpose* does it serve? Why is it important for Jesus to sit and eat so that the disciples could be witnesses to this act?

For one, it reminds us that our faith is an embodied practice. It takes place in the flesh, beside one another. Yes, faith is about other things like love and compassion and mercy and forgiveness but those things aren't meant to simply be talked about. They are meant to be *given*...in the flesh, in concrete and tangible ways.

It isn't just saying you are going to pray for someone ...as in "you are in my thoughts and prayers" but it's making sure that their prayers are answered. That meals are served. That

wounds are healed. That relationships are mended. That safety is guaranteed. It isn't assuming someone else will provide Jesus a meal when he asks, "have you anything to eat" ...it's making sure you fire up the grill.

The second thing to notice is that Jesus takes this simple request for food and teaches a powerful lesson. He is teaching his disciples that through an embodied practice of faith, we can turn our trauma and grief into beautiful gifts of healing and communion. That by calling us to the table with him, Jesus allows us to be witnesses to the resurrection, to triumph over defeat, to the victory of life over death.

We have been witnesses.

One of my former seminary colleagues wrote a beautiful essay on dying young as she battles stage 4 cancer. She reflects on the physical, tangible acts of loving her family, of experiencing life in all of its messy, glorious, miraculous reality. She writes, "*Oh to love someone in the flesh!*"

Oh to love someone in the flesh. Jesus asks have you anything to eat and invites us to experience that kind of miraculous reality of the mundane with one another. Where loving acts of care and compassion define Christ-like living. Where the belief in the bodily resurrection shows us what it means to have hope in adversity. Where things like forgiveness and mercy and healing and grace come to fruition around the tables of our lives.

Our reading from 1 John reminds us of the importance of this kind of embodied faith. In verse 18, which comes shortly after our assigned reading for this morning, we are told that we are not to love in just word and speech but in truth and in action. We are not Christians by word and spirit only. We are Christians by our own physical, concrete witnesses of love.

Essayist Maxine Kumin makes the point beautifully. She says, "*It is important to act as if bearing witness matters.*" So, how do our actions bear witness to the resurrection today?

Folks, we have all been isolated from gathering around tables with one another for a long time now. We have been isolated from loving one another in the flesh...of sharing meals, and hugs, and front porch visits. Of sitting by a hospital bed. Of mourning those who have died. Of rocking a grandchild to sleep.

And maybe during this past year, we have gotten a little rusty when it comes to those embodied acts of faith. But...it is time to bear witness again. It is time to bear witness in gradual, meaningful ways as we begin to emerge from a year of isolation. It is time to bear witness to your neighbors, to your family, to your enemies, to your loved ones.

I encourage you as you are able and as it is safe to come back together around table...whatever your table may be. Regather at the community organizations that need your assistance. Regather with family you haven't seen in a long time. Regather with friends that have been

lonely. And...regather here at church. Be a witness that our love for another has not been lost. Be a witness that our commitment to serving those in need as not been abandoned.

And when you are asked, have you anything to eat...be ready to respond with open arms and with open hearts. Let the gift of resurrection be ours to embody. Let us be witnesses together. Amen.