

“Dining with Jesus”

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April 18, 2021

**Luke 24:36b-48**

**36** Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” **37** They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. **38** He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? **39** 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.” **40** And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. **41** While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” **42** They gave him a piece of broiled fish, **43** and he took it and ate in their presence.

**44** 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.”

**45** Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, **46** 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, **47** and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. **48** You are witnesses of these things.

“Have you anything here to eat?” Jesus asks His disciples. It’s one of the first things Luke records the resurrected Jesus saying to them. First is a standard greeting, “Peace be with you.” That greeting did not seem to have the intended effect, though, as Luke tells us that the disciples were terrified, thinking they were seeing a ghost. Not much peace there. So, next, Jesus asks “Why are you frightened?” Perhaps Jesus should cut them some slack. After all, they did see him crucified, dead, and buried, and now he’s just showing up as if nothing happened. Jesus works to calm their fears, telling them to touch him and feel that he has flesh and bones, unlike a ghost. He shows them his pierced hands and feet. They are *not* hallucinating. Jesus is real and has truly risen from the dead. The Lord is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed.* Luke’s narration of this scene is

fascinating. He writes this great phrase, “While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering.” Other translations have this as “Still they stood there undecided, filled with joy and doubt” and “The disciples were so glad and amazed that they could not believe it.” Their fear seems to have shifted a bit. They are now less afraid and their joy is arising, but they still have doubts in the midst of their joy. It is at this point that Jesus asks “Have you anything here to eat?” *Man, three days in a tomb really brings out the appetite in you!* It just seems so incongruous, so out of left field. Jesus finds His disciples terrified. He speaks to them about their fear and their joy starts to arise in the midst of their doubts. And *this* is the moment that Jesus asks for some food?

The standard explanation of this is that Jesus asks for some food, which Luke makes sure we know Jesus then ate in their presence, to prove that He was not a ghost. Ghosts cannot eat food. Jesus is real and eats some food to further remove their doubts, though he did not really *need* the food. I have no problem with this explanation, as a starting point. It makes sense to me, and yet it seems incomplete. Perhaps Jesus asked for some food and ate it with His disciples partly because He enjoyed doing so, he enjoyed the communion, the fellowship with his dearest friends. Luke shares many stories of Jesus eating meals with people. He is known for that. In chapter 7, Jesus bemoans that the people call him “a glutton and a drunkard” for all of his eating and drinking with people. He eats with Levi, along with a “large crowd of tax collectors” and other sinners. It was at a meal with Pharisees where a woman anointed Jesus’ feet with ointment. He feeds the multitudes. He eats with Mary and Martha, with Pharisees and lawyers, and at the home of Zacchaeus. He shares what we call The Last Supper, where he institutes the sacrament of The Lord’s Supper. Then, just before our passage today, he meets two disciples on the way to Emmaus, and blesses and breaks bread with them. These are just the meals that Luke records. It seems that not only did Jesus enjoy eating with others, it was part of His ministry to and among them.

It was in the midst of these meals that Jesus taught about including those who society said were not to be included. One of the most common complaints about Jesus is the one recorded in Luke 15:2, “the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” *This* is the occasion Jesus chooses to share the parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and the Prodigal. He chooses to eat with those outside the parameters of polite society to show them that we are all welcome in God’s kingdom. Jesus did not stand *apart* from people, giving pronouncements from on high. Jesus sat *next* to people at the table, whether those

people were the Pharisees and scribes or the tax collectors. In a time where social status was even more important than today, eating with those considered sinners brought Jesus' social standing down. This is how those who grumbled at Jesus saw things, but that's not how Jesus saw it. He said that there was more joy in heaven when one sinner repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance. The reality, though, is that there are *no* people who need no repentance. Jesus came and dined with everyone, because all needed Jesus' presence in their lives.

Jesus comes and dines with us because we all need Jesus. In the reading before this in Luke, it is only when Jesus takes bread and blesses and breaks it in the presence of the disciples that they recognize Jesus. We too can recognize Jesus in the breaking of bread with one another. Remember that Jesus told us that where two or three are gathered in His name, He is there among us. I think Jesus delights in being with us in the fellowship of a meal, and that is one of the aspects of the pandemic that is most challenging for many of us. We cannot physically gather together for a meal, and so we grieve the loss of our fellowship over a meal, while greatly looking forward to a time when we can indeed gather around tables, fellowshiping with one another and with Jesus.

Jesus reminds us that such table fellowship is not to be an insular event, but instead we are to gather at ever-expansive tables. One of my great joys in ministry in this community is being part of the Interfaith Alliance of Champaign County. Doing so, I've had opportunities to share table fellowship with people who are part of different faith traditions – other Christians, Muslims, Jews, Baha'is, and even neopagans. It has been a wonderful experience as we learn from each other about what our faiths mean to us and how our faiths guide us in what we do. From my perspective, I have no doubt that Jesus is joining us at those tables. Those from other traditions bring their own faith understanding to the table, and we celebrate together. I love the quote from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks: "For though my faith is not yours and your faith is not mine, if we each are free to light our own flame, together we can banish some of the darkness of the world."

There is indeed much darkness in the world, and the world keeps showing us example after example of injustice, strife, and pain. I have no doubt, though, that lighting our flames together can banish some of the darkness of the world. I have no doubt that gathering together at tables – perhaps tables over Zoom these days, but tables nonetheless – can banish some of the darkness of the world.

And then, we go forth from those tables – dining with each other and with the Christ – to witness to what we have seen and heard. Jesus told the disciples huddled in fear that they were witnesses. Even though they were fearful and had doubts, they were to go forth into the world to share what they had experienced with Jesus, before and after His resurrection.

As Karoline Lewis, professor of preaching at Luther Seminary, says, “Jesus’ address to the disciples is not, ‘you will be witnesses.’ Not, ‘please be witnesses.’ Not, ‘consider being witnesses if you have time.’ No, ‘you are witnesses of these things.’ We are witnesses. As it turns out, witnessing is not voluntary, but a state of being.”<sup>1</sup> As we go about our daily lives, we *are* witnesses. As we choose whether we will seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God, we *are* witnesses. As we do or do not take care of the least of these, we *are* witnesses. As we speak up – or remain silent – on behalf of those experiencing injustice, we *are* witnesses. As we make decisions about how to spend our time and our money, we are witnesses. As we choose a spouse or a career or a home, we are witnesses. All that we say or do (or do not say or do not do) is a witness to our experience of the divine love of God. We *are* witnesses.

We are all struggling with fear and doubt these days. A global pandemic is a reasonable time to have fears and doubts. Add in the injustice and violence of the world around us, and we can be inclined to turn ever more inward. It is in the midst of that fear and doubt and isolation that Jesus comes to us and says “Peace be with you.” He shows us his hands and feet, assuring us that He is indeed real, and then pulls up a chair to the table with us. If we have eyes to see, we’ll find that Jesus has brought many friends with Him – tax collectors and scribes, alike. When we join in the meal together, we find the truth in the words of the hymn we sang a few weeks ago:

All who hunger, gather gladly;  
 holy manna is our bread.  
 Come from wilderness and wandering.  
 Here, in truth, we will be fed.  
 Blest are those who from this table  
 live their days in gratitude.  
 Taste and see the grace eternal.  
 Taste and see that God is good.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5126>

Amen.