

Third Weekend of Easter (RCL/B) "A Place for Us to Be Fed, Loved and Forgiven"  
Acts 3:12-19, Luke 24:36b-48  
April 17-18, 2021  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Ghosts don't eat! That seems to be the point behind the risen Lord chowing down on fish fry leftovers in this weekend's Gospel. At least these friends have recognized him, unlike Mary Magdalene in John's Gospel who mistook Him for a gardener, and the disciples from Emmaus in this Gospel by St. Luke, who thought He was some random stranger on the road until "they recognized him in the breaking of the bread." (Luke 24:31) Actually, those 2 disciples from Emmaus hustled back to Jerusalem to report their amazing encounter to the rest of their friends, and are interrupted in their storytelling by the same Lord who had walked with them, eaten with them, then vanished. So the good news is that these disciples know this being who has "startled and terrified" them (Luke 24:37) is Jesus, but the bad news is that they assume He's **dead** Jesus, a literal **ghost** of His former self.

But no, no, no, this isn't zombie Jesus, this is the risen Lord! To convince His friends, He invites them to look closely, to touch His body: "... *for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.*" (Luke 24:39c). Then He asks if they have anything to eat. (This must've been an all-male gathering, because I think the women would have offered Him food and drink before He had to ask for it!) The risen Lord accepts the broiled fish and eats it in front of them, to show He hasn't been conjured up at a séance, He's been raised from the dead, as the Scriptures foretold and as He had predicted, a prediction they either hadn't remembered or hadn't believed.

The living, risen Lord sits down and eats with His friends time and again after His resurrection and before His ascension: they were "in communion" with each other not just the night before He died, but at a home in Emmaus, a room in Jerusalem, and on the beach in Galilee

where He prepared the fish they had just caught and served it with bread. During Jesus' public ministry He and His disciples had dined together on a grassy Galilean hillside in the intimate company of about 5,000 men, plus women and children. They'd enjoyed the special dishes Martha & Mary prepared for the party after Jesus called their brother Lazarus back from the dead. Some of them had feasted with the Lord at Zacchaeus' house, when Jesus beckoned Zacchaeus down from his perch in a tree and invited Himself to lunch. Early on they'd celebrated with the couple married in Cana of Galilee, enjoying wedding delicacies and sipping what was probably the best wine ever, the only perfect vintage.... Actually, Jesus enjoyed so many meals with so many people that the stodgy religious establishment folks described him as a glutton and a drunk. He enjoyed Himself at table way too much and way too often for **their** taste and in **their** judgment.

Aren't some of **our** best times centered on meals, too? In our home a birthday means homemade birthday cake and lots of candles, Thanksgiving means turkey and dressing and cranberries, Fourth of July means cherry and blueberry pie covered with latticework crust to make it look like the American flag. And certain kinds of food and drink conjure the presence of loved ones who are no longer with us. In our family my Mom Mimi's broccoli puff casserole is as important as the turkey on Thanksgiving. She's no longer seated at the table with us, but she's "with us" in Spirit, for sure, just like my Dad's with me when I eat fresh cherries, feel the pit and remember how he'd eat them and somehow manage to save the pits in his mouth, then line them up between his lips so he'd look like Dracula ☺. My sister-in-law sent a recipe that Pastor Mark's mother typed up in 1973: Mark's family nickname is Buff and the header is, "Cider Buff likes." Eating and drinking connect us to each other, and food and drink connect us to those who have gone ahead, including our living, risen Lord Jesus.

The Lord meets His friends still in the Bread and Wine of Holy Communion, our Christian family meal. We join the family through Holy Baptism. Then we share in the family meal, the meal of the baptized, the Lord's Supper, with our brothers and sisters. This weekend we welcome fourteen of our third and fourth graders to the Lord's Table for the first time. It's been a start-and-stop process for the fourth graders, whose preparation the pandemic halted after just two weeks a year ago. It's continued this year, with the addition of the current third graders, all on-line using Zoom. It's a most unusual preparation, but possible through Mr. Ned's technological know-how and his finding of a lovely resource called "A Place for You: My Holy Communion Book," complete with videos in kid-friendly language.

The heart of the message to our children preparing to receive our Lord in Holy Communion is Jesus saying, "**Whenever you share this bread and cup, I will be there with you, feeding you, loving you, forgiving you.**"<sup>1</sup> The cover of the little workbook shows Jesus seated at a table with young and old people of all colors, shapes and sizes, some small enough to be held in others' arms, one in a wheelchair, His arms around the shoulders of those closest to Him. Our Lord is pictured beaming at all of them, ready to share bread and wine, His very self.

It's our belief in the **Real Presence** of Christ in this holy Sacrament, our trust that our Lord Jesus is **really present** "in, with and under" the consecrated elements of Holy Communion, that draw us to this Table. We believe His words, "This is my body, given for you"; "This is my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins." We obey His words, "Do this to remember Me." We believe that **He is with us: feeding us, loving us, forgiving us.** This is why we gathered on-line and cherished even **spiritual communion** with our Lord and with each other when it was impossible for any of us to physically commune. This is why people were willing to gather outdoors on freezing Sundays in December and January, to set up lawn chairs, to bundle up

with ski gear, hats, scarves, mittens, boots, to receive Holy Communion even though some days were so windy I felt like I was depositing a coin in a piggy bank when I dropped the host through the narrow slot of communicants' cupped hands so the host wouldn't sail out to sea!

We are invited to the Lord's Table week in and week out. The invitation is precious, and we RSVP "Yes!" Nothing is more precious than being with our Lord at Table. I'm just the waitress. Our risen Lord is the Host of the meal (in more ways than one ☺). He **is** the meal. When we eat and drink His Body and Blood they literally become part of our body and blood. We are what we eat. What better way to become more and more "little Christs"??

Ned & I can **tell** this to the children of our faith family, but actions speak louder than words. Our young ones will best come to know how precious Holy Communion is when they see others treasure and seek out the Sacrament: the people they love and admire, like older kids, teens, young adults, parents, teachers, coaches, older adults in their life. When we prioritize worship, when we come often, when we come joyfully, they notice. When we don't, they notice, too.

In this Supper our risen Lord Jesus feeds, loves us and forgives us, we're in life-giving community with each other, and we're in spiritual communion with our loved ones who have gone ahead, family and friends with whom we've shared many a meal on earth, and who have beaten us to the heavenly banquet table. Pull up a chair. There's always a place for you here! Amen

Daniel Erlander, *A Place For You: My Holy Communion Book* (Interactive Edition, Augsburg Fortress, 1999), p. 12.

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