“A Hungry Jesus”

3rd Sunday in Easter, April 15, 2018, Year B

Luke 24:36-48

First Congregational Church, UCC, Saugus, Massachusetts

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*36 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.*

Imagine we’ve gone missing for three days. Our family is frantic. They‘ve called all our friends and co-workers. They’ve called the police to help track us down. But no one can find any trace of us. It seems like we’ve just vanished into thin air.

Then, on the third day, we walk through the door at home. Everyone is shocked. The questions come: “Where were you?” “Are you alright?” “Why didn’t you tell us where you were going?”

This is what the disciples experienced when Jesus came walking through their door, three days after they saw him die. Despite having heard Jesus tell them in very specific and graphic terms what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem, they hadn’t quite taken him seriously. Their movement was going so well. Why would Jesus throw a wrench in the works and talk about his death to come?

But they’d all witnessed what had happened in Jerusalem. His arrest. His crucifixion. His death. His burial. And then silence. For three days they had been grieving. For three days they thought nothing else of their dashed hopes and shattered dreams. No one seemed to recall Jesus’ promise to see them again on the other side of death.

Yet, here he is. In the flesh. Right in front of them. They can’t believe their eyes. Is it really Jesus? He speaks: “Peace be with you.” It must be a ghost, an apparition, an illusion. No one can be truly alive after they’ve died.

But it *is* Jesus. He speaks again: “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

To prove he is indeed living and breathing once again, he asks them, “Do you have anything to eat?” Three days without food – he must be absolutely famished. And so they share a fish dinner together, around the family table once again.

Everyone is hungry. The disciples are hungry for details of what the past three days have been like. They’re dying to know: Did Jesus know what was happening to him during those three days? Did he feel any pain? Was he asleep or awake the whole time? Did he see angels? Did he see God?

And Jesus is hungry. He’s hungry for his friends. He’s hungry to be among the living once again. He’s hungry to touch another person, to hug them, to hold onto them. He’s hungry to pick up where he left off, teaching, preaching, and standing up for God’s justice in the world.

If we disappeared for three days and suddenly returned, what would we be hungry for? The smiling faces of our loved ones. A great, big bear hug. To sit once again in our favorite chair and look with new eyes at the home that surrounds us. Some home cooking, for sure. Some comfort food.

Even if we’ve *never* left home suddenly for three days and come home starving, there are still questions we can ask ourselves about our lives. *What are we hungry for?* What feeds us? What can we do to feed others?

From a Christian point of view, what *should* we be hungry for? If we use Jesus’ life as a guide, there are a few fundamental things. *First is a hunger to know God*. Jesus talked with God like he’d talk to a friend. He bared his soul to God, and God heard him, and spoke back to him. Jesus hungered for *us* to have a relationship with God just like his, so this should be our primary goal as Christians. If we’re not hungry for God, why are we here?

*Second, Jesus wanted us to hunger for peaceful relationships with our human companions on this Earth.* He showed us how it’s done. He called out those who put their own needs above others’. Once when he insulted a Syrian woman, he apologized when she defended herself. He sat down for meals with all the outcasts he could gather, horrifying his kinfolk with his *chutzpah*. He risked touching lepers so that he could heal them. Jesus wanted to feed us with peace so we could share our peace with others.

I know a person who is trying to revive a Christian youth camp and they are taking the scary step of inviting church leaders from denominations different from theirs to take part in round table discussions to help breathe new life into a tired, old ministry. We brainstormed about what core beliefs about Christianity that they should be teaching to kids. There were some around the table who were Christian fundamentalists, and I have to say I had a hard time breathing in what they were breathing out. I surprised myself with the depth of emotion in my response to their exclusive points of view. I wanted to *starve* them out of the conversation, as if the others present were not capable of discerning for themselves if these people were right or wrong; for that I was sorry. But when it came down to it, I realized that, for them, Jesus’ table was not open to everyone – their table was an exclusive club to which human beings, not Jesus, held the invitation. This is counter to our church’s open table and wide welcome to everyone, especially those shunned for being different from the mainstream. I also realized I have a lot of work to do to respond in more peaceful ways to those I don’t agree with theologically.

So, really, there are two fundamentals to the Christian life: hungering for God and hungering for our neighbor’s welfare. All our actions can be measured in relation to these two aspirations. Do we love God and our neighbor or not? If so, how do we express that love?

To look at this challenge of feeding and being fed in another way, we might ask ourselves the opposite question: Who or what are we trying to *starve*? Who or what are we *refusing to feed*?

Two widows who lost spouses at the 9-11 bombings at the World Trade Center realized how lucky they were to receive such an outpouring of support from people all over the country. Instead of retribution against Afghanistan, they began to think about widows there, where a woman who lost her husband could become a social outcast. The two American widows formed an organization called “After the 11th” to support Afghan widows and they even flew over to visit them. The American widows fed their hunger for the close connections they had lost with outreach to Afghan women who were as hungry as they were for love and acceptance. (*Feasting on the Word*, 428)

Could we, as Christians, do the same? Could we refuse to go the route of retribution, and even more, to actually reach out personally to bear a supposed enemy’s burden? What would Jesus have us do? I often think of the wars we’ve fought in Japan, Germany, Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. I wonder if the racism encouraged by our government in times of war has lingered in the generations who lived through those wars. I wonder if, as time goes by, we have forgiven, or moved on from prejudice against, our former enemies. I wonder how much God hungers for us all to gather around tables together and talk out our differences once and for all.

A final question for us to consider might be: *Where is Jesus now?* Is he still around? Does he still inspire us to do his work? Does he still point the way for us to God?

Consider this: Jesus is found wherever people gather to break bread in his name. Jesus is found in the hearts of peacemakers who work tirelessly so we can all go to bed safe and secure. Jesus is found at soup kitchens, food pantries, and coffee hours. Jesus is found in our hunger for justice and equality for all. Jesus is found in the faces of homeless children. Jesus is found in the hearts of those who truly love God. Jesus is found in the joy we experience when we hit all the right notes in worship and when we do the same in our lives.

Jesus asks us, “Do you have anything for me to eat?” How do we answer him? It might take more than three days for us to come up with an answer. But that’s OK. It’s a big question. For a start, why don’t we just pull up a chair at his table and talk? Thanks be to the God who feeds us. Amen.

References

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*Zondervan NIV Study Bible,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).