

“Love: it’s what’s for dinner”

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Grace and peace to you friends from God our Creator and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Commented [RZ1]:

Whenever life is overwhelming as it has been for the last 13 months or so, whenever I find myself in the deep end of stress, anxiety or confusion - there is always one constant that can make life just a little bit better: comfort food.

There is nothing like a delicious grilled cheese sandwich, or my mom’s baked lasagna and homemade brownies to reduce anxiety and provide immediate relief from the weight and heaviness. We humans hunger for comfort and security and that could be why in the past year, we all did a whole lot more baking. 30% of Americans have eaten more baked goods in the past year than normal – cookies and cake were our preferred choices. I remember the weeks and months in which our grocery stores in Summit County were not only limited on toilet paper and Clorox bleach, but were also cleaned out of flour and sugar.

This also may be one reason that in non-pandemic times churches specialize in potluck dinners and bake sales. In my experience, church folks know better than most how to fuel the body by putting love as the central ingredient in any dish, even in home-grown fresh produce. When words are lacking, we bring food. When we wish to serve comfort, it often comes in the form of casseroles and carbs, all seasoned with the compassion and a sprinkling of hope.

This reality is one of the things that makes the resurrection appearances of Jesus especially resonant with me. It seems, wherever there is food, you’ll find God. Jesus breaks the bread after walking the Emmaus Road, and in our story today, Jesus eats broiled fish in the company of his confused disciples.

He receives fuel for the body and gives them fuel for their faith. Jesus provides both comfort food and soul food— enough to satisfy the deepest hungers of our hearts.

Our reading is from the gospel of Luke. Commentators point out that throughout the gospel of Luke, Jesus spends much of his time going to parties and dinners and to eat with people all through Galilee. The parables showcase banquets, wedding feasts and fatted calves. And every time the resurrected Jesus shows up among his gathered disciples, there is food.

If you count the manger in Luke 1, every chapter of Luke contains a food element or reference.

Our resurrected Lord is not only our Savior but a very flesh-and-blood person who is hungry. When he appears to the disciples, they – understandably – think they are seeing a ghost which is very scary. These see him, but don't completely recognize him.

And even after he shows them the wounds in his hands and feet, and invites them to come close and touch him, then they're filled with joy AND they still don't entirely believe what they're seeing. It is possible to hold all these things in our hearts – joy, wonder, heartache, and doubt.

Jesus asks, "Got anything to eat?" And they bring him a piece of fish. The writer specifies that it is broiled, perhaps to appeal to our senses and make us hungry too.

Resurrection is not about floating around in heaven without bodies...it's here and now. Resurrection remembers the wounds of crucifixion but also overcomes death in the fullest and final sense. In resurrection, we are connected to God in every way; in mind, body, and spirit, we are redeemed and restored.

I realized in recent weeks that meals are not just about food. They are about companionship. This is why even people who eat alone often turn on the TV or scroll through their social media account – to have a semblance of community. We are the only species for whom eating is primarily a communal activity.

I got to know Frank at our local hospital this past year when he was a patient. He had Huntington's which is a rare degenerative disease that affects the brain and creates confusion. Frank did not understand why he was in the hospital and did not wish to talk with me when I first met him. I offered to read a story to play a game with him as he had a collection both of books and games in the room with him. After suggesting different things and getting no where, and I was about to leave, finally Frank said, "can you please just sit down and have a meal with me? I'm tired of eating alone." Which of course I was happy to do. After that, staff have rotated sharing meals with Frank as part of our whole person care approach. It not only addressed his loneliness, but sharing a meal improved his overall condition. And it blessed the staff as well.

During the past year, I am aware of friends and family having zoom happy hours and dinner. The only time I tend to drink wine is during my monthly book club, now on zoom. It feels less lonely than having a glass of wine alone.

In Luke 24 our resurrected Lord is definitely hungry. But it seems he is not just hungry only because he has been fasting and in the tomb for three days, he's hungry to share a meal and celebrate life;

He is eager to gather again with his friends; As many of us can relate to after a year of social distancing

He is hungry for them to become renewed and restored, to be a new community of faithful people who know and trust the power and love of God;

He is hungry for them to break bread together and feed people until there is no more hunger.

This broiled fish that they offer to Jesus not only shows Jesus' friends that Jesus is real and not a ghost, it is a symbol of the love that binds them and us together. IT is a reminder that God sustains us through all circumstances no matter how bleak, scary or lonely.

This resurrection story was so important for the early Church that in many places they included fish in their celebration of Communion. Even after that died out, the symbol of the fish became a sign for the resurrected Christ, and altars and church mosaics and even tombs were adorned with the fish.

Every week as we gather – even virtually from our own kitchen tables and coffee tables - we live out this story. We come as friends and family connected by the blood of Christ to hear Scripture, have our minds opened to new understandings and to share in this bonding meal.

And our hearts are opened to the ways that the Risen One is present among us.

We gather to remember where we've seen the Risen Christ in the unexpected places in our lives, and to remind one another to look for Christ in the face of the stranger.

We eat so that Jesus can be revealed to us in new ways. And then we leave fed AND yet hungry —longing for the same things that Jesus longs for.

We go out to look for the Risen Christ in the face of our sisters and brothers who are hurting; and to know him in the breaking of the bread around all of our tables.

We go out from this table to be witnesses to the power and reality of resurrection.

Jesus keeps showing up and surprising us with the power of God's love and to be our comfort food. We don't have to cower in fear any more.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!