

“Mealtime”

After Jesus rose from the dead and before He ascended to the Father, He appeared a number of times to His followers. These appearances are related in the gospels and in the Book of Acts.

Remember, Jesus’ resurrection body was different than our physical body. He could suddenly appear, then disappear. He could go through walls. He wasn’t always recognized right away. He was a “spirit body” – yet He showed Thomas the nail prints in His hands. To me one of the most interesting facets of His resurrection appearances is that in some of them He *eats* with His disciples. *He ate food!*

The Scripture for today, John 21, tells of one of those resurrection appearances. Seven of the disciples have fished all night and caught nothing. Early in the morning Jesus appears on shore, but at first the disciples don’t recognize Him. “Don’t you have any fish?” he asks? “No,” they reply. Then He tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. They do, and catch so many fish that the net barely holds them! (You may remember that Jesus had done something similar to this early in Jesus’ ministry. That story is found in Luke, chapter 5).

The gospel writer John himself was one of the seven men in the boat, and he’s the first to recognize that it’s Jesus. They hurry to shore, and find Jesus already has a charcoal fire going, grilling some fish. Let’s pick up the narrative: “Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.’ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish” (John 21:10-13).

Luke, in his gospel, relates how Jesus ate a meal with two disciples whom He had appeared to on the road to Emmaus: “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight” (Luke 24:30-31).

Later, Jesus appears to the 11 disciples plus some others, and while talking Jesus says, “Do you have anything to eat?” They give Him piece of broiled fish “and he took it and ate it in their presence” (Luke 24:43).

Now here’s a question: *If our resurrection body is anything like Jesus’ resurrection body, does that mean we will eat in heaven?* Maybe some of you are thinking: “I hope so! I like to eat!” If so, what kind of food do you think is available? Heavenly Hash? Angel Food cake? (We may be in trouble if we’re getting a steady diet of Devil’s Food cake!). Who’ll do the cooking? Some of you are thinking, “I hope it’s not me!” Will we have to worry about overeating and dieting? Will we have to shop at the Paradise Giant or Weis? I’m not sure these are issues we will have to deal with in heaven!

Do you think Jesus had to eat? Like we do now in order to stay alive? I doubt it. So why did Jesus eat with the disciples? I believe we get a clue if we look at the resurrection appearance

mentioned in Luke 24. Jesus suddenly appears to the eleven disciples and others. “While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 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.’ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence” (Luke 24:36-43).

Notice the context here: They still are finding it hard to believe that it’s Him, that He really and truly has risen from the dead! “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?” (Luke 24:38). Then He shows them His hands and feet. “Touch me and see!” Also note verse 41: “And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’”

*It seems that Jesus eats something to further demonstrate the reality of His resurrection. They weren’t dreaming. They weren’t hallucinating. It wasn’t a ghost or an apparition. It was Jesus, in His new body! He really was alive again! So, He eats for *them* – not for Himself. To bolster their belief!*

Are we a little shaky in our belief? Do we at times wonder if this stuff in the Bible really did happen? If death really was conquered on Easter Sunday? Hopefully Jesus has done enough to convince us!

But as we think about why the resurrected Jesus took time to eat during the resurrection appearances, I think there’s more to it. After all, ***this was not the first meal Jesus ate with people!*** Obviously, as a carpenter in Nazareth, he had to eat, just like any other human being. During His ministry, Jesus would often tell stories about banquets, feasts, wedding dinners. The gospel writers describe Jesus having meals with people.

In Jesus’ time meals and eating together had great social significance! We can easily miss this point when we read these stories in the Bible, because mealtime for us has changed! Think how mealtime has changed in the last 30-40 years. Remember *The Waltons* on TV. Picture that TV family. Mom, dad, kids, grandparents all sitting around the large table. Even having conversation – imagine that!

Today there are few families where 3 generations live together, or where you have an extended family living in the same household. A lot of people live alone. For some, mealtime can be one of the loneliest times of the day. When I was a single pastor I hated eating alone. Those were days before fast food restaurants. I lived in a small town where the only eating place in town was hamburger place called “Brownies”. (Brownies hamburgers were famous in that territory). My Sunday noon meal often was a TV Dinner, or canned chili or ravioli, or maybe Chef-Boy-ar-Dee spaghetti that came in a pack with the canned sauce and pasta. I so appreciated that there

were three families that often invited me to their home for a meal.

But even within families, family members often don't eat together, because of hectic schedules. Kids have to be at their sports practices or dancing or music lessons, or school activities. Parents are taking kids all over the place in different directions at different times. And they grab a quick bite when they can.

Or if a family is eating together, sometimes the TV is on, and family members sit as silent strangers. Or they have their head buried in their cell phones. Someone has suggested that because so many families hardly ever eat together we have lost one of the most important rituals of family life.

This was not so for the people in Jesus' time. Mealtime was a leisurely time for socializing, and sharing real togetherness. Meals lasted for several hours, and people didn't rush off.

In the Middle East of Jesus' time – and even now to a degree – to share a meal with someone was a guarantee of peace, trust, brotherhood, forgiveness! Jesus knew the powerful meaning of sharing a meal, and He took every opportunity to eat with people because it communicated something important about God and life!

Eating a meal with someone was a sign of friendship and acceptance. Jesus angered and offended religious leaders around Him because He ate with “sinners”. Jesus enjoyed eating with unreligious people, people shunned and excluded because they didn't keep all the religious rules and regulations. He invited Himself to the home of Zacchaeus, a hated tax collector, and ate with him and his tax collector buddies (which infuriated the religious leaders).

*By having table fellowship with prostitutes, tax collectors, and non-religious people, Jesus acted out God the Father's redeeming love for them! Albert Nolan puts it well: “It would be impossible to overestimate the impact these meals must have had upon the poor and the sinners. By accepting them as friends and equals Jesus had taken away their shame, humiliation and guilt. By showing them that they mattered to him as people, he gave them a sense of dignity and released them from their captivity... moreover, because Jesus was looked upon as a man of God and a prophet, they would have interpreted his gesture of friendship as God's approval of them... their sinfulness, ignorance and uncleanness had been overlooked and were no longer being held against them.” Jesus, sharing meals with both friends and outcasts, demonstrated His concern for *all*, and the inclusiveness of God's redeeming love.*

I think all of this is behind the reason Jesus, once He had risen, seemed to make it a deliberate point to eat with the disciples. Because more than ever, *they were the outcasts who needed Christ's friendship and forgiveness!* They had failed the Lord miserably during His trial and crucifixion: they chickened out...ran away scared...denied Him and betrayed Him. And they couldn't help but wonder: Could they ever be forgiven? Could they ever be restored? Were they any longer included in God's plans for the world? Would they always now be outsiders, estranged from the Lord they loved? And so, on shores of the Sea of Galilee, the Risen Lord

stands by a charcoal fire and says, “Come on, let’s eat some breakfast together!” Hallelujah! They were forgiven, and home again!

So where do we fit in? Jesus invites every one of us to a meal! In Revelation 3:20 Jesus says, “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you, and *eat with you, and you with me.*” Over many years I have used that verse as an evangelistic and personal witnessing tool. When sharing with someone what they must do to begin the Christian life, I would quote from this verse and say Jesus is standing at the door of your heart, knocking, and all you need to do is open the door and let Him in. But I would not include the last part of the verse, where Jesus says He will come in and eat with us, and we with Him. I thought that was not important. But now I see that that’s the key to the verse. Jesus invites us to open the door so we can share an unhurried, intimate relationship with Himself!

Maybe some of us have never opened the door of our life to let Jesus come in. Oh, we go to church. We believe that there was and is a Jesus, and that He is the Savior of the world. But we do not have a personal relationship with Him, and never had an unhurried, intimate meal with the Lord of life. We are still an *outsider*. If that’s the case, He invites us to invite *Him* in – to begin a relationship with Him that will last forever.

Or maybe we’ve done that – we are a Christian and are saved – but like the disciples who fled from Jesus during His arrest and trial, our relationship with Jesus has been strained, or taken a nosedive. Perhaps we have fallen into certain sins that have taken us far from God. Or we have become so involved in the things of the world that we have grown cold in our faith. Or perhaps over the years we have fallen into doubt, or become cynical and skeptical. Whatever the reason, we feel like an outsider, and we have lost the relationship with Christ we once had. The Risen Lord is standing on the shore of our Galilee, saying, “C’mon, let’s have breakfast together. I’m alive, you’re forgiven, and let’s start over again, fresh and new!

But the Risen Lord’s act of eating with His disciples may have been to remind them – and us – that this is the kind of meal sharing we are called to do. Even though we may have lost something today of the power of meal sharing, there is *still* something special about inviting someone into our home, sitting around a table, and eating together. *It’s a way of reaching out, in friendship, and love.*

But here’s the twist: Our normal inclination is to only want to eat with people we know well, people we like, people who think and act like us. But Jesus in His teaching and ministry taught and lived out the grace of eating together with people beyond our own narrow circle of like-minded friends. Jesus told a parable that has a vivid message: “He said also to the one who had invited him, ‘When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.’” (Luke 14:12-14).

How about inviting people who are alone, forgotten. I think of times when Nancy and I have gone a little out of our comfort zone and invitation some people to join our family for holiday meals. There was a widow lady in once church, Annie, who joined us one Thanksgiving (I believe it was). And another recently widowed parishioner friend whom we invited for a Christmas dinner with our extended family. And Dave and Mary Beth, who had moved from Tennessee and didn't have any relatives up north. They accepted our invitation to be part of our family one Christmas. All of these were wonderful times for us, and hopefully for our guests.

I think of church dinners and church meals, and how often a person or family new to the church, or maybe not part of the "inner circle" within a congregation, have been left to sit alone, while others in the church cluster around at the tables with their family members or close friends. This is a common practice in the church that pushes my hot buttons! Church dinners, for some people, can be very lonely times.

How about inviting people with whom we have a disagreement, or someone with whom we are estranged. There was a family in one of our churches that – to be honest - I didn't particularly like. There were reasons why I just didn't connect with them, and felt rather negative about them. Then one day they invited our family to their home for dinner. (They didn't have much money, and had three young children, but they invited Nancy and I and our three children). They served us a lovely meal. We had time to talk, and for us to get to know them. And the relationship was different after that act of gracious hospitality.

How about inviting people who are not Christians, not church goers. Jesus ate with non-religious people, people with bad reputations, people looked down on by others. Some of us make no effort to build relationships with unchurched people by eating with them.

Isn't it awesome that Jesus, after His resurrection, still made the effort to eat with people! He didn't have to (since He had a resurrection body), but He chose to. And in those gracious acts of sharing a meal, Jesus was teaching us a lot about God and life.

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