

Easter 3B

Lections: Acts 3:12-19; Ps. 4; I John 3: 1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

What would the church look like if we did not live out the Easter reality?

For the great fifty days we are renewing our baptismal promises. “What if we ignored the apostles’ teaching? If we neglected fellowship? If we never met to take a meal together? If we did not say our prayers?”

Today’s station of resurrection takes us into the heart of the Luke-Acts agenda where eating and drinking with Jesus is an organizing principle, says John Koenig in his book, The Feast of the World’s Redemption. The foundational feedings give us a sense of the early church, of the origins of the Eucharist as our gathering of community, and a focus of the unfolding vocation of disciples. In this gospel pericope Jesus opens the scriptures, eats with the disciples in fellowship, and then sends the believers out into mission for the whole world beginning in Jerusalem. Something important is offered here, a challenge for those who believe. We are told that this work will change the world.

Out of the ten meal stories in Luke-Acts six of them occur while Jesus is in transit to or from Jerusalem. Each of these meals has something important to say whether they point back to preparation or forward toward new tasks. These meals are part of the Jesus legacy and tell us that from these times together the disciples will remake the world.

It can come in simple ways. At the funeral on Thursday for one of our parishioners, a woman told me at the reception that she felt deep comfort in the welcome she received here. Invited into text and prayer, she was fed at the table. She felt that her own life was being made precious and sacred here, not just the one we were celebrating. Her life matters, she said, what she brought in with her and what she took out the door back into the world.

The disciples learned from Jesus to eat with all sorts of folks. Table fellowship had been a way of staying special but in Jesus all were welcomed and claimed as God’s own people. The Eucharist then became a heavenly banquet, a welcome table for all people. What was important was that it became one place where status or power were set aside. The table is a place where all are given the same without reserve. The disciples learned to share what they had with those in need. A full meal and leftovers sent to those absent, reminding them of their ongoing connection to the body of believers.

This radical sharing is still ongoing in some parts of the world. A priest professor from the Church of South India tells a moving story of all castes being welcomed in the Eucharist, an erasing of untouchables, of the chronically poor who expect exclusion into the whole and diverse body of the faithful. Table hospitality welcomes the stranger who becomes brother and sister, beloved friend and companion on the way. “One direct result of the learning, up building, healing, forgiving, reconciling, renewing of mind and prayer that takes place within the worshipping congregation is a strengthening of believers for their vocation outside the walls of the church. This strengthening can be understood as

redemption for the world...the new creation grows and the kingdom comes close,” says Larry Rasmussen in Koenig’s book. This is how we become faithful witnesses.

It may be as simple as grace before meals. When I ask “who will say the prayers?” often folks look at their shoes and prefer the professional prayer do the duty. Listening to my grandchildren this week offer their “thank yous” for the day changes the world. “Thank you for the playground and for the museum and for the food and for this family,” came from both the four and six year olds. This is a transformational time for me, watching as they learn gratitude for the beauty of their lives. It is no small thing to have an awareness of blessing. That table time was and is as sacred as this gathering today around this table. The world changes.

Even our drumfest last week with circles of adults and children, neighbors who were curious, small donations to meet the needs of Earth day’s focus on water came into relationship with this Eucharistic table. All of it flowed within this open table space. This celebration, this hospitality is part of the ongoing redemption of the world. It will be true when we celebrate the U2charist for AIDS relief as well.

In the Eucharist we celebrate God’s presence with us. We also celebrate our own real presences, who we are apart from the powers of this age. We are able through the Spirit’s presence to see ourselves as loved by God, growing toward all that we will be. That is what was claimed in the letter of John. We are the children of God welcomed to dine with Jesus. Here in the real presence we again place ourselves in the promises of God. Here the hungers and thirsts of the world are seen, the blessings of creation and life are lifted up, and new beginnings are proclaimed. In the midst of scarcity we offer abundance.

Our world is broken and so are we. Jesus promises rest or peace. From that comes renewal and that is part of resurrection. We get back to work but first we stop for breakfast, says Donna Schaper in Calmly Plotting the Resurrection. Today’s passage is an Easter breakfast where Jesus has a bit of broiled fish and also, most likely, some bread.

Schaper tells this story in her final chapter of the book. Once, not so long ago, a refugee child was crossing a border with her hand in a pocket, holding onto a piece of stale bread, the last thing her mother gave her before she disappeared. The rescue worker told her that her mother was not coming back. “The child put her hand in the worker’s hand and they walked on into a new life. The child took her hand off the stale bread and put it in the only bread that was there” – the hand of compassion, food for her journey.

Every Sunday is a little Easter. Every Sunday it is time for breakfast, for saying the prayers, for listening to teaching, for fellowship. One of my grandsons said early on Monday morning, “Grandma, my stomach would like some French toast.” Let me see if I can find a little bread.

Let me see if I can find a little bread. Amen+

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