

Message for the Third Sunday of Easter, Year B (4/18/2021)  
Luke 24:36b-48

What's with the broiled fish?

This post-resurrection appearance in our Gospel from Luke today is similar to that in last Sunday's Gospel from John. Several details are common to both: Jesus' word of peace, the invitation to see and touch his risen body, the commissioning of the disciples for the work of God's reign. What's unique to Luke is the fish.

It almost feels like an aside. It's as if Jesus suddenly gets a hankering for a snack in the middle of his reunion with the disciples: *Look, it is I in the flesh. Touch me and see that I'm not a ghost... Say, have you got anything around here to eat?* I imagine his bewildered companions warily handing over the first thing they find, only to watch in amazement as Jesus scarfs it down. *Mmm, that hits the spot. Now, let's get on with what's next.*

But, there must be more to this little anecdote in Luke's version of the story. The standard interpretation is that Jesus' consumption of the fish is proof of his bodily resurrection, like the invitation to touch him. Disembodied spirits don't have flesh and bones; neither do they eat and drink. Ergo, the risen Jesus must be a real body, that is, **the resurrection is not merely symbolic or spiritual, but material, physical, corporeal. And thus, it implies continuity: this is the same Jesus with whom his followers ate and drank before; once dead, he is somehow alive again in their midst.**

**And, if the risen Jesus is a body, then the good news of Easter must also be intended for bodies.** When we recite the church's great creed, we're reminded that by faith "we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." If we're to accept the truth of the resurrection, that life will be consistent with the goodness of life in the world as we know it now. To quote Stephen A. Cooper, "Bodily resurrection expresses the affirmation that the creature formed 'from the dust of the ground' (Gen. 2:7) is indeed good and what God intended."<sup>1</sup> So, God's promised salvation won't discard our humanity like a plastic wrapper; **embodied life is the means by which God both articulates and fulfills the promise.**

Tish Harrison Warren puts it beautifully: "In the end, we won't float off ephemerally into the by and by. We will see and know – even sensually know – this good old world made new. Through his resurrection, Jesus promises that everything we love in the world is lasting. We will taste and smell and feel and touch any and everything that God has called good."<sup>2</sup> Alleluia, indeed!

Still, there's one more detail in today's Gospel that warrants our attention, especially since it's hidden a little from view. We may assume that to eat the broiled fish in the disciples' presence means that Jesus ate it alone as some kind of spectacle, just to make a point. But, people in the Ancient Near East never ate by themselves. Although it's not explicitly stated that this meal included Jesus'

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<sup>1</sup> *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Vol. 2, 426.

<sup>2</sup> *Prayer in the Night: For Those Who Work or Watch or Weep*, 118.

companions, Peter's later confession in the book of Acts implies as much: "We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and *who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.*"<sup>3</sup> In both Luke and John, sharing food with the risen Lord is a central feature of the Easter event.

**And, if sharing a table means sharing a life, then a meal with the risen Jesus is a glimpse into God's future, a foretaste of the feast to come.**<sup>4</sup> As scripture repeatedly envisions, our "life in the world to come" will be a great banquet. "They will hunger no more, and thirst no more," the visionary author of Revelation says of the multitude "who have come out of the great ordeal."<sup>5</sup> Notice that he doesn't say that we will eat and drink no more. No, **fullness of life in the end will mean abundance for everyone.**

**Of course, eternal life starts now. Our patterns of eating and drinking in this age reflect our partnership with God in shaping the world as God intends it to be.** I'm reminded of the Turkish couple who in 2015 opted out of a fancy reception in order to spend their wedding day feeding 4,000 Syrian refugees. "We think we've made an investment in happiness..." they said.<sup>6</sup> An

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<sup>3</sup> 10:39-41. Italics mine. See Robert J. Karris, *Eating Your Way Through Luke's Gospel*, 94.

<sup>4</sup> Joachim Jeremias, as cited by Karris, 33.

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 7:16, 14.

<sup>6</sup> [www.boredpanda.com/bride-groom-feed-refugees-wedding/?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_campaign=organic](http://www.boredpanda.com/bride-groom-feed-refugees-wedding/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=organic).

investment in happiness, yes, and a vision, however temporary, of human life as it should be.

Our feast today in worship will be less elaborate than that, but just as much a communion with the living Christ and his beloved family. So, come to the table of the risen Lord, friends. Take the bread and wine, his very life given and poured out for you, and taste and smell and feel and touch what God has called good. Give thanks for the goodness of life in the flesh, and for the promise of resurrection life, the promise that God is making everything new.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia!