



May I Suggest the Fish?
Luke 24:36-43
Rev. Jenny M. McDevitt
November 17, 2019
Pledge Dedication Sunday

I owe our Confirmation class an apology for this sermon. You see, every time we gather, we eat together. We eat together because it's practical (we tend to meet right after worship). It's also theological. As we've been talking about for the past few weeks now, Jesus' ministry is in many ways defined by his table: where it can be found, who is invited, what he says, and why people keep coming back for more. But more than anything, our Confirmation class always begins with a shared meal because it's relational. You learn a lot about each other when you eat together. It was at our table that I learned just how stressful and time consuming it is applying to high school around here. It was at our table that I learned who prefers dogs, who prefers cats, and who can't distinguish between gerbils and hamsters. And it was at our table that I learned there would be only one hard and fast rule when it came to our menu: absolutely no fish.

This sermon isn't really my fault, though Jesus asks for something to eat, and the disciples give him some fish.

Broadly speaking, this should come as no surprise to us. Well, maybe not the fish specifically, but the fact that Jesus eats. The

way the Gospels tell it, Jesus eats his way through his ministry. If he spends his life eating, why shouldn't he spend his resurrected life eating, too?

The details, admittedly, are a little strange. Jesus comes to his anxious disciples and offers them peace. He calms their fears and shows them his hands and his feet. And then he, the one who has always offered the meal, the one who has always been the provider, the one who can make water turn into wine and crumbs turn into a feast — he asks the others for something to eat.

Ben Witherington and Amy Jill Levine, some of the foremost scholars of the Gospels, one of them Christian and one of them Jewish, observe, "[Post resurrection, the disciples doubting continues.] In a startling non sequitur, Jesus asks them if they have anything to eat. Given the images of food, feeding, and table that permeate this Gospel, the request is more than just a wish for a late-night snack. Nor does Jesus state that he is hungry. The food he requires is not for his own sustenance, but for

the disciples' instruction. Ghosts do not eat. Neither do angels. Resurrected bodies do."¹

Look, he says. It's me. It's really me. Look at my hands, and my feet. And look, watch me eat. You remember how often we ate together, right? I still need to eat. We still need to eat.

Look he says, "It is I myself." Death has lost its power to destroy.

Fred Craddock was a preacher with a particular gift for storytelling. One of his most memorable is a story of how he and his sisters would pass the small-town summers by playing games together.

One of his favorite games as a child was hide and seek. Fred loved this game because he was a rather small man, and an even smaller child, giving him a considerable advantage when hiding.

He could hide in places his sisters didn't even know were places. One day he crawled under the front steps. He got under the very bottom step right under the porch. His sisters were running up and down those stairs looking for him, but he was perfectly hidden there. It was dark and he was entirely out of sight. He thought to himself: "They will never find me! They will never find me! They will never find me!" Then it dawned on him: "They will **never** find me." And so he stuck a toe out from under the steps. And one of his sisters screamed, "I found you!"

Even in that game, we may think what we want is to hide, but what we really want is to be found.

Resurrection promises us that this much is true: we are found, forever.

And this table reassures us, every time: you do not need to hide. There is a place for you here. Come, and eat.

You see, the way God made the world, the way Jesus understands the world, and the way we are called to live in the world: food is about nutrition, but it's never just about nutrition. And clothes are about our wardrobe, but never just about our wardrobe. And stewardship is about money and generosity, but it's never just about money and generosity.

I am convinced that stewardship, at its very deepest core, is about love.

Ultimately, that's why we're reading this scripture passage on this day. It is the very last story of Jesus of sharing a meal, and with this particular meal, he promises that resurrection makes sure we are never left behind. "Look, it's me, it is I myself," he says. "This is not a trick. It is me, just as you've always known me, and at the same time different than you've ever known me before."

And so he asks, "Do you have anything to eat?" I can't imagine that they could eat with him and not remember all the other times they had eaten with him.

The last time was in that upper room — bread that he broke and the cup that he poured. He told them this world would break his body, but not his love, and that's exactly what they were seeing.

There was that meal at Levi's house, Levi, the tax collector — do you remember him? It was there that Jesus showed his followers that he would not treat unrighteous people the way we do. We tend to keep our distance, but not Jesus. He goes right where the brokenness is. There was the feeding of the 5000, where the disciples looked around at the crowd and wanted to send them away. Them — it's a lonely word. Jesus couldn't do that, because to him, they weren't them; they were us.

¹ Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Luke* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary).

He visited Mary and Martha, who each approached his visit and meal preparations differently, reminding us that sometimes, particularly when the world is falling apart, we need to listen to Jesus.

And there was his meal with Zacchaeus. After that, Zacchaeus spent every day practicing his faith. He took care of the poor. He was fair in his work. And he trusted that someday salvation would come. A lot happened at that table.

A lot happens every time Jesus comes to the table, every time we come to the table. What Jesus reveals at the table is how life is to be lived. At the table, we see the world as it is, but we also see the world as the power of God's love will make it. When Jesus is at the table with us, we get a taste of our future.

At his table, relationship is claimed, friendship is practiced, grace is served, forgiveness is sampled. At his table, our very best selves are called forth. Our best selves — individually and as a church.

Here's what I'm trying to say — resurrection is not just life that does not end. That actually wouldn't be very good news at all. Resurrection is life that is redeemed. Life that is transformed. When we finally become exactly the way God has always intended for us to be.

Lately I have been thinking about time and history. What happens to us is that we spend our whole lives becoming ourselves. We spend a lifetime becoming the person we are. This is what I mean:

When I was 10 years old, I loved reading. I loved it so much I really didn't want to do anything else. Birthdays and Christmases were full of books and more books, and probably some clothes and socks and other necessities, but I didn't care about any of that. I just wanted to read.

By the time I was 15, that had changed. I still loved to read, but in high school I had discovered field hockey. I woke early in the morning to run a few miles before school, I stayed after school for practice, and every night before bed, much to the chagrin of my parents, I went downstairs and ran through even more drills. When I thought about college, I wanted to go to a good school, but I also wanted to play hockey while I was there.

When I was 20, I was in college. I was majoring in creative writing, and I was playing field hockey. But then I broke my ankle, and I missed most of the season my junior year. I discovered there was a whole host of other activities in college when you don't spend all your time in the athletic department. I had written for the school newspaper, but when I had more time on my hands, I was invited to edit the paper. When my senior year rolled around, I didn't go back to playing hockey anymore. It didn't matter to me nearly as much as it once had. And it was in those last years of college that I also wandered into a Presbyterian church for the first time.

There are still traces of that 10-year-old, and that 15-year-old, and that 20-year-old in me, but they are a little harder to find these days.

I turned 40 last month. I still love reading, but now I realize that no matter how many books I read, I'm not likely to read everything I'd like to before I die. I still run, but mainly in circles around my dining room table, chasing a misbehaving puppy. I spend more time in church each week now than I did in an entire year of my childhood. Every day I walk down busy New York streets, a far cry from my Midwest upbringing.

If at age 10 or 15 or 20 you would have told me that who I am now, it would have been

impossible for me to imagine. The mystery is that I am both at the same time. I am and I am not that 10-year-old who would never take her nose out of the book. I am that kid and I am not that kid. And I think the process of becoming who we are isn't completed until our own resurrection. We still aren't finished, not one of us.

This is true for me, and it is true for you, but perhaps most importantly this day, it is true for us as a congregation.

Jesus is asking us, "Do you have anything to eat?" And here's what I know — every time we gather around this table, Jesus is there, too. Grace is served. Hope is known. And we get a taste of our future.

I don't know what it will look like. But I trust that it's going to be delicious.

Even if you don't like fish.