

Luke 24:36-48 Common English Bible - Jesus appears to the disciples

While they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" They were terrified and afraid. They thought they were seeing a ghost.

He said to them, "Why are you startled? Why are doubts arising in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet. It's really me! Touch me and see, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones like you see I have." As he said this, he showed them his hands and feet. Because they were wondering and questioning in the midst of their happiness, he said to them, "Do you have anything to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish. Taking it, he ate it in front of them. Jesus said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. He said to them, "This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Acts 4:32-35 - Common English Bible - Sharing among the believers

The community of believers was one in heart and mind. None of them would say, "This is mine!" about any of their possessions, but held everything in common. The apostles continued to bear powerful witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and an abundance of grace was at work among them all. There were no needy persons among them. Those who owned properties or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds from the sales, and place them in the care and under the authority of the apostles. Then it was distributed to anyone who was in need.

Here we are, back in the upper room. You may feel like you are having a *déjà vu*. Last Sunday we had a similar scripture from the gospel of John, when Jesus appeared to the disciples in an upper room on that first Easter evening. This is another account of the same story, though Luke does not mention Thomas, he talks about everyone's doubts. The disciples are back in the upper room — the same room where they ate the Last Supper and Jesus washed their feet. Diana Butler Bass, who is a theologian and church historian, made an interesting observation. She noticed that not only have the disciples returned to this room, but Jesus also returns to the room! While we have made the cross a key symbol — the most recognizable symbol— in Christianity, she wonders if the table might have been a more significant symbol. She notices the pattern of **Table – Cross – Tomb – Table**.

After he rose from the dead, Jesus does not appear back at the place of his death, he does not show the disciples the empty cross — but he *does* return to the room. He does return to the table, and in this gospel reading he requests a piece of broiled fish — he eats with them as a sign of resurrection! Just before this scene Jesus appears to some disciples on the road to Emmaus, and it's when they break bread together on a stop in

the journey that their eyes are opened, and they recognize Jesus. The table and the meal, being fed and feeding are a big part of the resurrection of Jesus.

Luke is also the writer of the book of Acts, and in the reading today we hear the passage of how the early disciples shared everything in common, and none of them had any need because of that sharing. We are in the season of Easter, and that is one of the texts paired with the Easter readings. Why? ***Luke wants us to know that this is what a resurrected community looks like. They are a transformed community that cares for one another and that feeds and looks after those who struggle.***

Now this story in the book of Acts is pretty idyllic and utopian. It doesn't stay that way for long; we know that very quickly there are challenges and crises. But the expectation for a different way of living is set.

William Willimon, a New Testament scholar, sees this transformed community as the evidence for the resurrection. This is what he says: *"When you think about it, the quality of the church's life together is evidence for the truthfulness of the resurrection. The most eloquent testimony to the reality of the resurrection is not an empty tomb or a well-orchestrated pageant on Easter Sunday, but rather a group of people whose life together is so radically different, so completely changed from the way the world builds a community, that there can be no explanation other than that something decisive has happened in history."*

The question Willimon then asks is "If this is what the resurrection looks like, **why don't you people look more resurrected?**" It's a good question for the Church today. Have we reduced the good news of Jesus to saving souls? *How resurrected do we look?* The importance of the table, of feeding each other literally and as a symbol for caring for others in general, struck me — because food ministry is a particular ministry we are called to at Wall Street Church.

This year one of the tasks we will have, coming out of our Visioning time, is naming **three key causes** that we are called to supporting as a church. It's important that we do this discernment process because we do a lot in this church. There is a great need in the community and the world and in the lives of individuals here, and we have at times tried to do it all. But we can't do it all. We are not meant to do it all. I don't exactly know what those key causes are, but I'm pretty confident one of them is food ministry: our Sunday Suppers, our Friday morning breakfasts, and the Saturday lunch served at the library. We have recently created a Food Ministry Team — sort of a committee— so that instead of individual ministries like the Sunday Supper planning, a small group helps to think about the concerns of all the ministries and the needs of those ministries under one umbrella.

How do we discern this? There is a real need: as homelessness increases, food prices rise and loneliness, depression and anxiety increase, having spaces where people can gather and be fed is so needed. There's a need, but it's also a ministry that has a lot of energy— people are eager to help out. There is often joy and laughter in the kitchen — along with some grumbling about why someone would think scalloped potatoes was a good idea as they are elbow deep in dish soap, getting a fantastic arm workout scrubbing

giant pan after giant pan— even that became a source of humour! We see tangible results in people in the community feeling blessed by the food that is provided.

What will it mean if we name **Food Ministry** as one of our 3 key ways of expressing God's love out of this church? It would mean that we prioritize what we are already doing. If there was competition for space (as there is in this place) we would give priority to Food ministry. It means that we would invest financially in the ministry. It may be that we begin to think of food ministry more broadly, looking for example at world hunger. We already dabble in the issue of world hunger — we dabble in a lot of causes— but we don't necessarily connect it to Food Ministry, to which we are specially called at this church.

There is so much hunger in the world. In my view the saddest, most heinous is the starvation taking place in **Palestine**, in Gaza. I say it's the saddest and most heinous because it's entirely man- made. It's not a drought that caused it. It's not Climate Change. It is one nation choosing to starve a group of people. The Canadian Food Grains Bank on their website points out that: **“Even before the [current] crisis, many families in Gaza faced acute food insecurity: In 2022, 65% of the Gaza population was either severely or moderately food insecure. ...The Food Security Sector currently estimates that 2.3 million people, the entire population of Gaza, is food insecure.”**

A lack of food and good nutrition affects people no matter how old we are, but its effects on children are even more devastating. I was reading an article in the Washington Post from last week that talked about the effects of starvation on children.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2024/gaza-food-famine-malnutrition-children-aid/> Asim al-Najjar was born on my birthday this past Dec. 21 in Gaza City and he weighed more than eight pounds. (More than any of my babies ever weighed!) He is now in hospital because at 3 months old he weighs less than he did at birth — he's just over 6 pounds. His mother was breastfeeding, but she wasn't getting enough to eat and so her milk dried up and they couldn't find enough infant formula. Even if Asim survives this current acute lack of nourishment — if he survives the bombings, the increased rates of infectious disease — he and other infants and children will face a lifetime of health struggles. Zulfiqar Bhutta, a doctor at Sick Kids hospital in Toronto, said that “At the simplest level, if you have impaired nutrition and growth, your brain stops growing.” Other organs also won't develop properly.

At our **children's ministry** gathering last Sunday after church, we made some resurrection craft crosses and then we talked about what it meant to be an Easter people. How do we live because Jesus is alive?

We talked about our food ministry, the local Food Bank and the Canadian Food Grains Bank which helps with hunger in the world. We talked about how the CFGB is trying to help with the situation in Palestine and in Sudan and in other crisis areas. On the first Sunday in May, Henry Reinders from the CFGB is coming to Wall Street to tell us a bit more about the organization, and then after church there will be a bake sale and a treasure table. The kids have decided they are going to have a table to sell things too, to support the Food Grains Bank.

Perhaps the Food Ministry in this church might go to the next level too. What could possibly be a more critical next level than caring about world hunger?

I remember my theology professor way back when I was going through seminary giving this weird image/story. I probably remember it because it *was* weird, but it made a point. He talked about a Christian community that lived along a riverbank, and one day a baby in a basket floated down the river. Someone saw the baby and quickly rescued it and brought her into their home. The next day another baby floated down the river and someone rescued and adopted that baby. Soon there were more babies — 4 or 5 a day. They organized people to watch at the river for babies and started organizing who would care for them. The numbers began to increase, and they created orphanages for these babies and all sorts of services. This was going on for a long time when someone said: “Wait! Stop! It’s not enough that we are looking after all these babies. We have to go up the river and find out why this is happening and do something to fix it!”

As Christians our call to care has often been reacting to and helping people who are suffering, or nature that is threatened. And this is good and right. We need to be able to respond in a crisis. But sometimes we get so busy in the work of caring that we don’t stop to *fix the system that is broken*. We don’t stop to ask “Why is this happening? How can we change it?” I admit that this is hard work. This is the work of *doing something*. And not just for the individual starfish — but doing something that will make a difference for the ocean so that the starfish don’t wash up on the beach in the first place. This is the work of advocacy and activism.

It was because of pressure put on the Canadian government by people who care that the Government decided to stop sending weapons to Israel. There are other things that governments can do, like impose sanctions — as they did for South Africa. Sometimes governments choose to do this because it’s the right thing to do. But often they do it only because enough people cry out and say, “*This isn’t right!*” They listen partly because they want to be re-elected the next time around.

Some people are leery of churches getting involved in politics. Friends, this is about caring for the world. This is what a resurrected community looks like. As someone said: “***We have shrunk Jesus to the size where he can save our soul but now don’t believe he can change the world.***” Christ is risen! Jesus is alive and calling us, the church, to live and bring that life to others. This means that as the church our call is not just to respond to crises but also to ask “*Why is there a crisis? What can we do to change it?*”

Being a people of the resurrection means we are different. It means we have *hope* ... even when things look hopeless. We believe Jesus is big enough to change the world and that we are part of that.

The church was called to be an alternative community, a sign of resurrection, a signal to the world that Jesus has made possible a way of life unlike anything the world has ever seen.

Thanks be to God.