

## Have You Anything Here To Eat? (Acts 3:1-20; I John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36-48)

"Have you anything here to eat?" Sure seems like an odd thing for the Resurrected Jesus to ask, doesn't it? He had just appeared to his disciples, startling and terrifying them. Scripture says that they were wondering to themselves if he was a ghost, when he said, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet....Touch me...."

And then, at this dramatic moment, Jesus said, "Have you anything here to eat?" At such an incredible moment, the Resurrected Jesus' thoughts were on food? "By the way, have you anything here to eat?" It would be like being in the middle of a wedding ceremony, and out of the blue, hearing the groom suddenly speak not vows but a question to the minister: "Have you anything here to eat?"

Scholars point out Jesus wanted to eat something to prove to his startled, doubting disciples that he wasn't a ghost. But, let's stop and think about it. Usually Jesus' words had layer upon layer of meaning, right? And so, I think that there was surely much more behind Jesus' question than just a simple request for a small piece of broiled fish.

Actually, throughout his ministry, Jesus talked quite a bit about food. When he was tempted in the wilderness, he said, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:3). He taught his disciples to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). When his disciples forgot to bring food, he told them, "You of little faith, why are you talking about having no bread?" (Matthew 16:8).

At times Jesus spoke of physical food for the stomach, but at other times he spoke of spiritual food for the mind and soul. For example, when he told his disciples, "beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees," he later said, "How could you fail to perceive that I was not speaking about bread?"...And then the disciples "understood that he had not told them to beware of the yeast of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matthew 16:12). When he ate with sinners (Luke 15:1-2), Jesus fed them not only physical food but also the spiritual foods of repentance and forgiveness, that they could know health, peace. He even referred to himself as "the Bread of Life," saying, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51). And on his last night with his disciples, when Jesus wanted to give his disciples something to do to always be reminded of him, he didn't tell them to wear crosses or to wave palm branches.

He told them to regularly gather and remember what he said to them as he fed them bread and wine: "Take, eat; this is my body" (Matthew 26:26).

There are two reasons Jesus spoke so often about food, and we're apt to miss them unless we know the Older Testament. First, food had always been a major way God demonstrated his love, just as a mother nurses her child, or a bird takes a worm back to the nest. In the beginning, God provided all the food we needed. He told Adam and Eve that they could eat of every tree in the garden. But Adam and Eve chose to eat food that God never intended them to have, food that God knew would not be good for them, and, well, "the rest is history," the history of humanity. Nonetheless, God kept trying to show us that he is the God who loves us and wants to feed us the good food we need. Thus, God's Prophet Elijah symbolically gave the widow of Zarephath a jar of meal that never emptied and a jug of oil that never failed throughout the drought (I Kings 17). And in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, the Psalmist spoke of God as the one who prepares a table before him, feeding him so abundantly that his cup overflows. And so, through food, Jesus demonstrated his godliness.

But, much more than just showing his godliness, secondly, through food, Jesus showed that he was the messiah. The Prophet Isaiah had said that the messiah would be recognized by his feeding of the nations. Isaiah said that "the nations will come to Israel to share in the blessing of the everlasting covenant" (55:1-5) and that they will "come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." And after Isaiah, this expectation grew. The Israelites believed that "the God who fed the people with manna in the wilderness will feed the people again" (II Baruch 29:8), through his messiah. By Jesus' day, this expectation of the messiah coming and feeding the people was especially attached to the celebration of Passover.<sup>1</sup>

No wonder food played such a role in Jesus' ministry. It was not only a way of actually helping people, by giving them physical food. It was also a way of declaring that his love for the people was God's love for the people. It was a way of declaring himself to be the messiah.

And Jesus wanted to be sure that his followers would continue to feed others, physically and spiritually. Once on a mountain before a crowd of 5,000 persons, Jesus' disciples had failed to grasp the importance of feeding people. They wanted to send the people away to fend for themselves. In response, Jesus was blunt and emphatic, "You give them something to eat." When the Resurrected Jesus returned, he wanted to see if his disciples had learned the

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<sup>1</sup> Bowman, Walter, "Sermon Ideas for Matthew 14:3-21," Part 3

lesson. He wanted to know what they were going to feed the people in God's name—how they were going to continue his messianic feast that invites people into the Kingdom of God—how they were going to give the people the food they need for their journeys of life and their journeys to heaven. Thus Jesus asked, "Have you anything here to eat?"

The gospel of John closes with Jesus asking Peter, "Do you love me?" Jesus asked Peter this question three times, and each time Peter answered, "You know, Lord, that I love you," Jesus told Peter, "Feed my sheep." "If you really love me, Peter, then you will feed my sheep. You will continue my caring for and nourishing hungry people." Surely Jesus was speaking not only to Peter but also to all of his followers—those in the past and those of us here this morning in the present. "Have you anything here to eat?" he asks us. Have you anything here to demonstrate God's love and caring? Have you anything here to help hungry people? And he's constantly asking us that same question.

When the economy gets so bad that people are having to choose between food and medicine and we hear about a program called Angel Food Ministries, is it not our Lord we're really hearing, asking us, "Have you anything here to eat?"

When we receive a letter informing us that some of the children at Burke Elementary School don't have enough food in their homes for them to eat over the weekend, Jesus asks us, "Have you anything here to eat?" When we see a homeless person holding a sign, if we listen closely, can we not hear Jesus asking, "Have you anything here to eat?"

When people are lonely or in despair, again, Jesus whispers to us, "Have you anything here to eat?"

When people are eating, or ingesting, or taking into their minds and their hearts, ideas and values that are not good for them—that end up either making them sick or leaving them still hungry for something more, Jesus demands of us, "Have you anything here for them to eat?"

I recently read about a man who had a little sign on his bathroom mirror. And so every morning when he looked in the mirror, he saw the sign, which said, "Good morning, God. What are you doing today? And how can I be a part of it?" Scripture assures us that every day, always, God is at work in the world to feed the hungry. No wonder Jesus asked and still asks his followers, "Have you anything here to eat?"

We have lots to offer such hungry souls. We have our belief in a God who loves and cares for all people. We have our belief in Jesus, who showed us how to live a life in right relationship with God, and who sacrificed his life to give us forgiveness of sins and the hope of life eternal. We have our church family, a caring fellowship where others can learn more about our awesome God and learn and grow and serve with the rest of us. We also have our own stories of how God and others have fed us spiritually on our journeys of life.

In a terrible battle during WW II, eleven young soldiers were killed. Later their buddies gathered behind the lines for a committal service. It was a gloomy, dreary, rainy day. A chaplain intoned lifeless words from a prayer book. There was not a spark of life or hope, until a young red-faced boy from Arkansas in a beautiful, clear tenor voice began to sing. "There's a land that is fairer than day and by faith we can see it afar." This young man witnessed to his faith, and in doing so, he fed souls that were starving for a word of hope in the midst of suffering and despair.

And recently, I read of a woman who fed those who were standing in the line for half price Broadway tickets. She was a plump, middle-aged woman feeding the pigeons bread, while she offered those waiting in line spiritual food. She spoke softly of God's great love for the world. She told of God's deep sadness in seeing talented and beautiful young people dying of AIDS. She spoke of God's heartbreak that we cannot seem to love one another in the way which God has loved us. She spoke of Jesus as the one who came to show God's love. She told of his gracious invitation to all people. All the while, she tossed handfuls of bread to an enormous flock of pigeons. And, the people in line listened as if they had never heard before.

All around us, there are people who are hungry, physically and/or spiritually, yearning to be invited to the feast, to be lovingly welcomed and fed. Our Lord knows that he has given us all that we need to satisfy their hunger. And so he tells us, as he told Peter, "Feed my sheep." Amen.

-- Terry Chamberlain Diehl; Hickman Mills Community Christian Church; April 26, 2009