

**The Third Sunday of Easter + April 15, 2018**

Once I attended a meeting where the facilitator began with an ice-breaker. Usually a good thing to do, especially since those of us sitting around the circle that day had met one another for the first time. The question for the ice-breaker was "Name a memorable meal from childhood." Gosh, where do I begin, I thought to myself. There are so many.

As I pondered the question, I began in my Mom's kitchen and all the wonderful meals conceived and created there. I had visions of her great spaghetti, chicken & dumplings, banana cream pie. I also remembered the picnics and lunches, the occasional treat instead of dining at home we would go to A&W our Dairy Queen. Then, I remembered Hilda. Hilda was our neighbor, just three houses down from us. She was a grandmotherly person who loved to bake for the neighborhood. She made the best cookies and pound cake. After school, my little brother and I would get off the bus and on the walk home, would often make a detour to Hilda's house for milk and cookies and pound cake. Once, my brother, maybe age 5 or 6 got mad at me and took it out on the whole family, so he decided to run away from home. Where did he go? It wasn't long before Hilda called to say Todd made it as far as her house where he was drinking milk and eating cookies and pound cake.

Do you have memorable meals? Can you think of places and people with whom you often gathered around food and drink? Do any of these meals stand out a special? Meals around which community has been formed, relationships nurtured, love shared, and hospitality extended.

One of our Phinney saints, Lowell Olson, died last month. A week ago, we held the funeral here and afterward we had brunch downstairs and then, there was open mic. Folks were given opportunity to share stories and memories of our brother in Christ. The sharing of stories went on for some time. Many a story has been told at tables where meals are shared.

Wondrous things occur when people gather around food and drink. Stories are told. Grief is processed. Memories come alive. Around meals, tears are shed and laughter is shared.

Consider the many meals that take place in this community – Bread for the Journey, the WAY, small groups, meals every day for our CDC students. In these venues, community is formed and fashioned.

Important things happen around food and drink – state dinners for visiting dignitaries, special banquets, birthday parties. Sometimes people have been known to sit down over a meal or something to drink to settle disputes, make negotiations, or iron out differences over a cup of coffee. Important things happen around meals like dates! Very early in our courtship, I took Britt to a nice restaurant in Portland. It was one of our first dates and I was more than a little

nervous. It was probably too worried about making a good appearance and that got the best of me. So, as the evenings progressed, I tipped over a glass of wine, not once but twice.

Sometimes we work hard at bringing our best selves to a meal or what we think to be our best selves and much of the time, what is revealed is our real and vulnerable selves. Gather around food and drink and friendships are nurtured, relationships are strengthened, and great revelations take place.

Jesus knew something of the power of meals. His ancestors celebrated their identity in God around the sacred meal of Passover every year. Jesus' Hebrew ancestors also knew something about the sacredness of every meal. Jesus held that value in his heart and even expanded it by welcoming everyone to meals – feeding the multitudes bread and fish, dining with religious leader and outcasts and sinners, and letting the wine flow freely during the wedding at Cana.

No wonder Jesus left us a meal by which to remember him.

Jesus left us a meal so we could remember him. “To remember me,” says Jesus, “don't think about me. Do something.” And what do we do? We gather in Jesus' name, give thanks to God over bread and cup, share bread and cup among ourselves and in doing so we share Christ's very body and blood.

Gather around food and drink. Share a meal together in Jesus' name and in this act of remembrance, community is formed and re-formed. Our identity as disciples is shaped and we get to taste and see the goodness of God.

It should come to us, then, as no surprise that AFTER the Resurrection, Jesus should reveal himself to the disciples around food and drink.

The Risen Jesus makes himself known around meals. In John's Gospel, Jesus shares breakfast on the beach with the disciples. In Luke's Gospel, the Risen Jesus sits down at meal and makes his presence known in the breaking of the bread. Only when they invite him in for a meal, at the breaking of the bread, is he recognized. The

That brings us to our Gospel reading for today. Jesus shows up, not as a ghost or a spirit but with flesh and blood and then, in a most human and fleshy way, he asks a most ordinary question. “Do you have anything to eat?”

Jesus is no disembodied spirit. He is no ghost. The Risen Jesus meets the disciples asking for something to eat.

Later in the service, at this Table, we will pray: “Reveal yourself to us, O Lord, in the breaking of the bread, as you once revealed yourself to the Apostles.”

And the Risen Jesus shows up as promised and more than remembering him, Jesus re-members us! God gathers a disparate bunch of people every Sunday and puts us back together again, making us one. Jesus re-members us, make us the body of Christ. So, we eat from the one loaf and we drink from the one cup. And we are raised to new life.

Yes, wonderful things happen around meals and around this meal: stories shared, joy is deepened, community is formed and re-formed, relationships are nurtured, forgiveness is given, thanksgiving is made, hospitality is extended, grief is processed, God's vision is made known.

In the midst of our lives that are busy and chaotic and unpredictable and in a world where so much is uncertain and unjust and frightening, and when the journey of faith itself is filled with so much surprise and messiness, we can count on the Risen Jesus to show up at meal. We can depend upon it.

Jesus shows up every Sunday, opening our minds to receive the scriptures and feeding us with food and drink to bring us back into faith.

Great things **happen around** food and drink and around this meal, Jesus takes us as we are, feeds us, loves us, re-members us, and gives us power to be Jesus' presence to our neighbor.

The beautiful thing about the church year and that practices vary somewhat depending upon the season of the year. You have noticed, no doubt, that during Easter we do not kneel. We won't kneel until after Pentecost. We stand to receive the gifts of bread and cup all throughout this great Easter feast. Standing is the posture of resurrection and joy. It is the posture of a people set free.

At the Great Vigil of Easter, the cantor led us in an ancient hymn of praise where we sang out, "This is the night" and in that great hymn we described why that night was so special. "This is the night," we sang out "that our forebears were led dry-shod through the Red Sea, the night in which Christ broke the chains of death, rose from hell in triumph and the night in which all sin was washed away ..."

And that set the tone for all of Easter. We've been set free. We rejoice and are glad and so we rise in the dignity bestowed upon us by God. Delivered and set free and made part of the community of the Risen Jesus. So, when you come forward, to share the bread and the cup, take special notice of your sisters and brothers, rejoice for this meal is our common meal. Jesus re-members us and raises us, making us the body of Christ again.

We don't linger here. The feast we share issues in a bit of bread and a sip of wine for each of us. The fullness of God's reign is yet to be revealed. One day, all nations will feast in God and death will be swallowed up. This meal is a foretaste of that day.

In the meantime, we carry the grace of this meal into the world and into our daily lives so that every meal, echoing this one, is a sacred meal where the Risen Jesus shows up to bring people together. We are sent as witnesses to participate in God's mission of making this dream come true.

I like to think it is no coincidence that the room below this Table is the PRLC Food Bank. There's a direct line between communion and the church's vocation of making community. A direct line between feeding hungry people here and hungry people everywhere. A direct line between extending hospitality around this table and around every table. You see, Jesus raises us as the body of Christ and sets us into the world to gather all the hungry ones, all the despised and outcast, all the suffering and lonely and to feed them with the bread of compassion, looking back to how Jesus made every meal holy and looking forward to the day when all will feast together.

Here's a helpful way to think about how we live as the risen body of Christ – you are what you eat.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!