

Easter 3

April 10, 2016

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That Jesus in his post-resurrection appearances is always eating is significant. First, it shows that his resurrection was a bodily one. A spirit has no body and cannot eat. By eating with his disciples, Jesus is showing them that he is physically alive. Gathering the community for a meal also reinforces his teachings and helps them to remember his original instructions and especially the miracle of the loaves and fishes.

Jesus could have returned to the beach near where the disciples were fishing and begun yelling at them and upbraiding them for returning to their old ways. Sure it would be easy to romanticize their fishing as a way of simply doing what came natural to them, for they were trained, professional fishermen. Yet fishing, not for people but for fish, represents a forgetting of their lessons and an emotional regression, almost as if their time with Jesus was just a passing memory.

Rather than take them to task, Jesus first performs the miracle of the great catch (153 no less) and then he gathers them for the meal. It's in the context of post-meal conversation and relaxation that Jesus reaches out to Peter in what had to be an intense but beautiful exchange, "Do you love me?" (John 21:15). By asking this same question three times of Peter, Jesus was not only commissioning Peter but showing us what it means to be in community with a group of fallible people. Jesus commands, "Feed my lambs...Tend my sheep...Feed my sheep".

Juan was from Cuba and raised in the pre-revolution era and the rise to power of Castro. Because so many Cubans had Spanish origin, the siesta traveled with them. At lunch time, schools and shops would close and families would come together for the main meal of the day. One day, however, Juan had misbehaved and was kept after by the teacher. He knew his parents would worry about him. The clock turned and about thirty minutes in the door burst open. His father had a very serious look on his face. Never stopping or speaking he simply walked over to Juan, took him by the hand and walked out of the classroom. The only thing his father said on the way home was, "We couldn't start without you."

When we say that “The Episcopal Church Welcomes You” there are no commas after the “You”. There is not a long list of people who are not welcome. It is intentionally open-ended. Also of great value is our stewardship of the Lord’s Supper. All baptized people are invited to receive, even people who are not members of our church. And while we don’t have an all-comers feast, we also don’t check for baptismal certificates either. It’s not our supper; it’s the Lord’s and he seemed to eat and drink with just about anyone.

Table fellowship was a huge issue for the early church (see 1st Corinthians 11). Out in the world, it was unthinkable that people of different classes would sit at table together. To do so would imply that they were of equal status. What was impossible in the world was normative in the church, where people of all classes, men and women, even children, would come together break bread, hear the Word of God, and strengthen and encourage each other for another week in the world.

That world seems to be more fractured and divided by the day. The so-called Religious Freedom bills are doing nothing to unify us and in fact undercut the very message of Jesus, but for me to respond to proponents of these bills outside of the modeling of Jesus would also be a mistake.

I think I’m right. The people who push Religious Freedom bills think they’re right. If I vanquish them or they vanquish me we just reinforce division. I don’t know the specifics on how to change the dynamic, but I’ll bet there is a lesson modeled for us from the Risen Lord. It probably begins with being gentle as Jesus was with the disciples, and perhaps a sit-down meal in the presence of our Lord. Oh and that question that Jesus asks of Peter and all of us too, “Do you love me?” *Amen.*