

**The Church of the Good Shepherd**  
The Rev. Christine Love Mendoza  
Third Sunday in Easter – April 15, 2018  
Luke 24:36b-48

In his 1980 hit song “Everybody’s Got a Hungry Heart”, Bruce Springsteen sings of this enduring human condition. The first verses read like this:

*Got a wife and kids in Baltimore, Jack  
I went out for a ride and I never went back  
Like a river that don't know where it's flowing  
I took a wrong turn and I just kept going*

*Everybody's got a hungry heart  
Lay down your money and you play your part  
Everybody's got a hungry heart*

Lately, I’ve been thinking of our hungry hearts. I know mine is certainly hungry and, in my life, I have taken far too many wrong turns. This is a hunger that I have sought to satisfy in all sorts of ways and in all sorts of places... and yet, this hunger endures and only seems to grow. Edgar Allen Poe may have put it best when he wrote,

*Sometimes I'm terrified of my heart;  
of its constant hunger for whatever it is it wants.  
The way it stops and starts.*

While today may be the third Sunday in the Easter season, in the Gospel lesson we just heard from Luke, it is still Easter day. Just that morning, the women went to the tomb where Jesus had been laid to prepare his body for proper burial, only to return to the gathered followers of Jesus to tell a tale that sounded too fantastic to be real. A tale of an empty tomb, of burial wrappings left behind, and of a vision of an angel who made the earth-shattering announcement that Jesus has risen.

Just that day, two disciples walked the sad journey to Emmaus puzzling all that had happened over those few days and despairing what seemed like certain failure of the one they followed and called Messiah and Lord. And yet, to their surprise, they walked with the risen Lord along this journey, even while only recognizing him later in the breaking of the bread.

And it was just that night, that the resurrected Jesus appears before the gathered disciples in Jerusalem, saying “Peace be with you.” Like with the two journeying disciples, Jesus seemingly appears suddenly and out of nowhere.

It’s no wonder these folks were frightened; no wonder they thought the resurrected Lord to be a ghost. Luke writes that they were “startled and terrified.” Nothing in their lives to this point could have prepared them for this experience. No matter that Jesus preached and taught this over and over, trying to prepare them. An encounter with resurrection is always unexpected. And these disciples are no longer as they were before; they are forever changed.

Jesus says to them, “Peace be with you. ....Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” The risen Lord most certainly has physicality – this is not some disembodied spiritual resurrection. *Touch me and see...* the

resurrected Jesus has flesh and bones. His body still bears the wounds of his crucifixion and he presents these wounds so that the disciples may see, touch, and believe. This is indeed the same Jesus from Good Friday...and yet he is different as well.

Seeing that they are still struggling to comprehend – still struggling to believe and embrace this crazy, awesome truth that stands before them – Jesus does something else unthinkable. *He asks them for a snack:* "Have you anything here to eat?" Jesus is given a piece of broiled fish and he eats it in their presence. It seems that the risen Lord is hungry.

Throughout our scriptures, it is clear that Jesus liked using the communal act of eating and sharing meals to make his presence and the in-breaking of God's kingdom known throughout his ministry: eating with those who have been cast out of decent society; demonstrating the abundance inherent in God's kingdom in the multiplication of loaves and fishes to feed 5,000; turning power on end by washing the disciples' feet before the sacred Passover supper in which he instituted the Eucharist. And Jesus frequently used wedding banquets as analogies of God's kingdom and of who would be invited and who would ultimately join the party.

Table fellowship became a distinct mark of Jesus' earliest followers and continued to be so throughout the early church. Our celebration of Holy Eucharist – our feast of praise and thanksgiving – is not merely a ritual of words that our clergy pray for everyone's benefit. In our church, while we do celebrate the Holy Eucharist in remembrance of Christ, it is also a meal - a holy meal from God's holy table, but also meal for us all. Along with the communion of saints, those past, present, and to come, we gather before the altar to break bread together and share the common cup. We eat with our bodies, as we also receive in our hearts by faith, the Body and Blood of Christ, and this very physical and very spiritual nourishment works within us to sustain us as we follow the Way of Jesus. We do this week in and week out, and after so many repetitions, we sometimes forget how audacious it is.

When I was at seminary, we had regular worship together. Each day, we gathered for morning and evening prayer, and each day we celebrated the Eucharist. Frequently, family and friends of students would also attend our worship, not to mention other guests of the seminary. In the spring of my senior year, I was standing before the altar waiting to receive communion. Next to me stood the eight-year-old son of a classmate. As a good soon-to-be priest's kid, he had his hands carefully placed together to receive what was likely the zillionth communion of his short life. But something was different today. Today, this boy was paying attention in a new way.

When the priest approached him holding the communion wafer out and saying those oh-so-familiar words, "the Body of Christ; the Bread of Heaven", it was like he heard them for the first time. His face lit up with shock and he snatched his hands back. And in apparent distress, he cried out, "NO! NOT THE BODY!" The priest was pretty much stunned, standing there with her hand still outstretched and holding the wafer. We, too, were stunned, and after a shocked silence filled the room, we all erupted with laughter, and after a few beats, the priest regained her composure, smiled, and moved on to give me the wafer.

But, somehow, that little boy got it. In that brief moment, he grasped what was really happening. I don't know what he was thinking, but I can only imagine that the fullness and physicality of the resurrection and the Eucharist was overwhelming. I imagine that he, like the disciples that Easter night, was "startled and afraid." It doesn't get more real than eating. Jesus' appeal to "touch and see" has also become, *taste and see*.

On that night, in that room in Jerusalem, the risen Lord who has conquered death and the reigning powers of this world, is hungry. And he is hungry for more than just fish. By eating the

broiled fish, by participating in the shared meal of the disciples, Jesus demonstrated that he was not only physically present with them but also that he was hungry to be in intimate communion with them. Part of the exquisite beauty of the sharing and consuming of the Eucharist is not only that in this bread and wine the real presence of Christ is made manifest, but also that the act of receiving and eating this common meal is one of the most physically intimate things we can do with each other.

Sharing a common meal means that we have all taken within us the same elements. And these elements that we share also become one with our bodies, and, in this action, we become one with each other. At these times, we truly commune with each other...we become parts of one shared body, one community in Christ. We are no longer merely ourselves as individuals, but now also ourselves in corporate unity. And it is in community that we are transformed.

And isn't that what we all are truly hungry for: transformation, community, knowing and being known, spiritual nourishment? Our hearts are hungry. Our hearts are hungry for the food that truly sustains us. We are hungry for spiritual nourishment amid a veritable buffet line of materialism, with its constant message that we will be happy if only we buy this and look like that, and the myth that we must do it all on our own. We say, "No man is an island" and yet we exalt the false secular doctrine that we each must be entirely self-reliant, and in doing so we are living lives that are less than fully human.

But our hearts know better. Our hearts are hungry, even as our bellies are full. Our hearts are hungry for connection and communion with what really matters. Our hearts are hungry for the salvation found in true communion with God and with each other. May we all come to this altar together to share this Holy Communion, so that we, too, may taste and see and become one body in Christ.

*Amen.*