

**The Church of the Good Shepherd**  
The Rev. Christine Love Mendoza  
Third Sunday in Easter – April 14, 2024  
Luke 24:36b-48

This morning, I thought I would continue my homiletical theme of using pop hits from prior decades as a lens through which we might approach our Gospel lesson. In 1980, Bruce Springsteen released the song, “Hungry Heart,” which became his first big hit on the charts. In “Hungry Heart,” Springsteen sings of our shared hunger found in the human condition – that persistent hunger for something more, something greater than ourselves.

The first verses of Springsteen’s song 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  
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 about **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, my hunger endures and only seems to grow. I think this hunger is one that we all share – one that seems to be deeply embedded in our humanity. 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.*

Today we may be celebrating the third Sunday in the Easter season, but 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 his gathered followers to tell a tale of an empty tomb that sounded too fantastic to be real. Just that afternoon, two disciples walked the long, sad journey to Emmaus, puzzling all that had happened and despairing what seemed like certain failure of the one they called Messiah and Lord. And yet, to their surprise, later in the breaking of the bread they realized they had just been walking with the risen Lord. And it was just that very night, that our Gospel lesson picks up the story with the resurrected Jesus unexpectedly appearing before the gathered disciples in Jerusalem. And like with the two journeying disciples, Jesus appears suddenly and out of nowhere.

It shouldn’t be surprising that Luke tells us that the disciples were “startled and terrified.” And it shouldn’t be surprising they thought the resurrected Lord was a ghost. Nothing in their lives to this point could have prepared them for this experience. Encounters with resurrection are always shocking. So, Jesus then tries to soften the shock by saying, “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 so very different as well.

Seeing that the disciples are 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?" He is then given a piece of broiled fish from their dinner table and he eats it in their presence. And it seems that even 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 known his presence and the in-breaking of God's kingdom. He ate with those who have been cast out of decent society; he demonstrated the abundance inherent in God's kingdom in the multiplication of loaves and fishes; he turned 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 feast.

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 yet 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 just how audacious and awe-some it is.

When I was at seminary, we had regular worship together – daily praying the offices and celebrating the eucharist – and frequently family and friends of students would join us. One time, I was standing at the altar rail waiting to receive communion. And right 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!" and ran out of the chapel. 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 then erupted with laughter, and after a few beats, the priest regained her composure, smiled, and moved on to give me the rejected Body of Christ.

Somehow, that little boy got it. In that brief moment, he grasped what was really happening. I don't know exactly 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, like the disciples that Easter evening, he 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 among 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.

Think about it. Sharing a common meal means that we have all taken within us the very same elements. And these elements that we share also become one with our bodies, and, in this action, we become one with each other – connected in a physical and spiritual way. 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 in this community that we are transformed.

Isn't that really what we all truly hunger for: transformation, community, knowing and being known, spiritual connection with something greater than ourselves? Our hearts are hungry – hungry for the food that truly sustains us. We are hungry for spiritual nourishment amid a veritable buffet line of materialism, with its constant messages that we will be happy if only we buy this or look like that, and the myth that we must do it all on our own.

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.