

**Who Is Putting on the Apron When It's Jesus Who is Hungry?
Jesus' Pendant to Startle Us with His Presence!**

Luke 24:36-45

(After an amazing journey, Jesus is hungry.)

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“Have you anything here to eat?”

If that question were asked to one who has very little, or is hungry also, it could be a traumatic question, since the one who is asked might need to say, “No.”

However, for many of us, especially those of us who love to cook, the question, “Have you anything here to eat?” is music, music to our ears! We are glad to feed loved ones.

When our son was seventeen, he knew that I would be excited by the decision that *our home* had been chosen as the gathering place for his friends on the night of the Jr. Prom. In fact, he was afraid that I would be *too* excited. He said to me, when he revealed the plan, something like this, “Here’s the deal, Mom—they’ll come over here, dress here, take pictures of each other, under one condition: *that you not offer anyone anything to eat.*” It was a test of my ability to control myself. (The night of the prom I managed to hold up my end of the deal by forcing myself to stay out of the kitchen.)

For many of us, “Have you anything here to eat?” is music to our ears. That’s especially true if the person who is hungry is someone who has been away for a while, or on a journey. When they return, we are ever so happy to feed them.

This certainly must have been true of Jesus’ friends who were together, *after* Jesus had been crucified, *after* he had died. Jesus **startled** his friends when he appeared alongside them. He began with a comment so typical of their friend and Rabbi, “Salome,” (Peace be with you.) You would think *that greeting* would have revealed to them who he was. But Jesus had just recently died. His standing there, in their midst, was understandably confusing. What were they to think? Were they seeing a vision or the real, physical Jesus?

There are several different stories told in the different Gospels about Jesus’ interactions with his disciples after he died. We are reading from the *Gospel of Luke* today, and his story is unique. It’s helpful for me to keep in mind that *Luke was a physician; bodies mattered to him. Hunger was a diagnosis, a good diagnosis.* When we call someone after they have been ill, or after surgery, to see how they are recuperating, we might ask, “Are you eating okay?” When people are eating again after being ill or after surgery, we trust that they are on the road to recovery. We are often relieved when someone who has been ill *asks us*, “Have you anything to eat?”

Jesus’ asking his friends, “Have you anything here to eat?” was music to their ears, for it meant that he was physically present, whole, *real* to them. That’s surely the reason Luke the physician includes that detail in his Gospel.

Imagine the disciples’ response! I visualize his friends scurrying about. “I have a fig in my pocket.” “I stored some olives over here.” “Eat these apples.” “Wait, I caught

some fish this morning. It isn't any trouble at all to cook them. Here, I'm grilling the fish for you right now."

Our All Church Picnic will have a very different mood than the gathering of Jesus' friends, when Jesus appeared at their side and surprised them. They had been grieving. We'll be in a festive, playful mood.

Jesus' friends probably were not thinking about food when they saw him. On the contrary, most of us will have brought a dish to share.

Maybe they weren't eating when Jesus **astonished** them with his presence, but Jesus and his friends sure were accustomed to sharing many good meals together. Christianity is a food-affirming religion. Think about it, Christianity never made a dogma out of diet.¹ Moses had formulated food laws for the children of Israel, but from the beginning, Christianity liberated people from following those laws.

Hospitality to strangers, no matter how or what food was eaten, was more important than following regulations on food. Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism all integrate rules for feasting and fasting into their beliefs and practices. But we are not preoccupied with the right or wrong foods to eat, or what to do to make them "ritually clean."

In typical Protestant fashion, we are to *discern* when and how to follow the spiritual disciplines of fasting; no rule governs this.

*Jesus talked much more about how to treat people who are poor than he did about how to prepare food or what to eat.*²

Think of the stories about Jesus. We see Jesus being asked *to provide food*. It is said that Jesus fed 5,000 people from a few loaves and fish, and he provided wine for at least one wedding. People looked to Jesus to wear the apron!

People recalled and recorded Jesus being the provider, the "Bread Winner." But we don't have lots of memorable stories of his *being fed*.

In general what we remember best is what is **shocking**, out of the ordinary. It **surprised** me when I was told NOT to offer food when the teenagers came over to get ready for the prom. It **startled** me precisely because plenty of times these same teenagers had stayed for spaghetti, or had asked "Are these cookies for everyone?" or had inquired whether I was in a mood to prepare lots of quesadillas.

Jesus' question, "Have you anything here to eat?" might also have been **startling** because he was usually the one who *had fed the disciples and even the multitude*.

If the Rabbi who washed his disciples' feet would have appeared and, instead of saying, "Have you anything here to eat?" had said, "**Hand me the apron.**" That would have at least been in character. It would have been just like the Servant King, the Empathic Rabbi, the Comforting Counselor, the Creative Miracle-worker--to offer to cook.

Actually, on this corner of God's world, we do have plenty of people who arrive and ask, "Have you anything here to eat?" In fact, when asked, you all have answered "Yes" quite often. With the help of the Missions Committee and all of you, we give people who come to the office mid-week a "Meal in a Bag." When other Redlands churches asked if we could help feed the hungry at Jenny Davis Park on the 3rd Saturday, our Share Ministry team answered, "Yes."

We did not need to analyze our community to determine how we could fill needs. The request came to us, "Have you anything here to eat?" by Youth Hope ministry, and

now we host young adults who are homeless on every Tuesdays and Thursdays on our Courtyard.

And guess what? We have yet another opportunity to answer “Yes” to the question, “Have you anything to eat?” There’s a very tiny United Methodist congregation of about 20 in Joshua Tree that has been serving breakfast on Saturdays once a month to a very large homeless population in Joshua Tree. Our Riverside District Churches are trying to help out--both the Joshua Tree congregation and the homeless--by feeding these hungry people the other three Saturdays in the month. If 14 congregations say, “Yes,” to the question, “Have you anything to eat?” then each congregation will need to provide breakfast 4 Saturdays a year. I asked people who were at the Wednesday dinner here this past week if they thought we could consider this request, and you would have thought that **Jesus himself had arrive and asked if we had anything to eat**. People responded, “Yes! We can do that.” I tell you--Christ’s presence IS here in this place, in this congregation. Christ is alive!

Something that makes picnics so **much fun**, especially annual ones, are **reversals**. We toss water balloons with the intent to get messy instead of trying to stay “clean” at church. We sit around picnic tables, not neatly in pews. Sunday School teachers play softball. Children and adults play on the same team.

Something that makes potlucks so **meaningful** is that *we are hungry and we offer food*. We all take on the role of provider, and we all take on the role of recipient of the provisions of others. We all “wear aprons”; we are interdependent. Actually, that very interdependence IS characteristic of the Christian value of *hospitality*. All are eating together at the same table.

Just as Jesus **startled** his disciples with his presence, Christ could **startle us today**, whether or not we attend the Church Picnic. Christ can be alive for us wherever we are and with whomever we eat.

We tend to say “grace” before a meal, as a prayerful beginning, before eating. However, *I think that what happens during a meal is often what is holy*. When we get to talking with someone whom we’ve just seen on Sundays 3 pews ahead of us, and we realize we’ve found a friend, we begin to feel that we belong here, and something amazing has happened.

How would we *know* “Christ” is with us wherever we are? I’d say “The Christ” is present whenever we experience a **burst of love** either for someone we know well or for a brand new person in our lives. Maybe it’s fair to say “Christ is present” especially when deeper love or insight arrives after there has been friction in a relationship. Christ is present in the sincere desire of the Israelites and Palestinians to resume peace talks--and their stated hope that peace and two states are possible. I believe that the kinds of transformations Jesus fostered can take place often--they just may happen more *frequently* when we’re ready to be **startled** by a blessing.

Right now people in Pakistan, I hope, are about to be **flabbergasted** at how much the rest of the world cares about them as they grieve, as they survive, and as hope returns to their lives after the worst flood in Pakistan history. Whether the recipients are Muslim, Christian, or some other religion, *you and I* might call it “Christ” who is present when people who are desperate are **shocked at** the compassion of others.

We pray that there will soon be a lot of *amazement* for people who have applied for jobs. We might call it the presence of Christ when dramatic and beautiful reversals

occur for people who have waited and waited for work, and they connect with employment that benefits both the employer and themselves.

As the last US combat troops left Iraq this week after 7 years of war, we can give thanks--Christ's transformative power is present and alive. We pray for Iraqi people to govern well and to feel support of other people around the world.

When there is an outpouring of love, especially in **startling** events, that reminds us that God's healing love never died. It still hangs around—maybe especially where there's food, or music. Today and many days, may we be tied to *God's apron strings of grace*.³

¹ p. 42

² Christianity is a food-affirming religion. "*Our Carry-Ins Carry On*" that tradition!

³ We discussed the ways God "startles" us in the Children's sermon, likening this to when the "Jack" jumps out of the Jack-in-the-box. We know it's going to jump up, but it startles us each time nevertheless.