Feeding Jesus

A meditation on Luke 24: 36-48

Rev. Cathy C. Hoop Grace Presbyterian Church April 18, 2021

It feels a bit like one of those riddles – the kind in which someone is found dead in a room, but the door is locked from the inside. Only with this riddle, life is found inside the room rather than death. For the disciples, maybe it was more like the reverse of an “escape room” challenge. (Those games in which you are given clues and have a certain amount of time to solve the puzzle and find your way out.) Instead of needing to break out, Jesus broke in, and they were left to unravel the mystery.

Jesus appeared to distraught disciples and intensified their fear. He expected shock and awe and knew they would need consolation. He showed them his hands, his feet, his identifying marks. This was no ghost. The scars? Clear confirmation…but not exactly a confirmation without strings attached. A demanding confirmation in the recognition of his identity as the son of God. A demanding confirmation in the naming of the brutality of his death. Confirmation of God’s power over death, *and* the acknowledgement that humanity’s abuses of Jesus had left their marks.

Speechless disciples don’t know whether to be alarmed or relieved, petrified or ecstatic. Since they are still “wondering and questioning in the midst of their happiness,” Jesus offers them another sign: he asks them for something to eat.

They were legitimately terrified when Jesus came to them on that Easter night. If he wasn’t a ghost, how did he manage to appear to them? But if he were a ghost, how could he eat a piece of broiled fish? On top of their exhaustion and fear of being imprisoned, they were now trying to get their heads around the complexities of incarnation. The story of every follower of Jesus.

I imagine that with stunned silence they watched as Jesus ate a piece of broiled fish. Watched him chew. Watched him swallow. Offered him a cup of wine to wash it down. Nodded as he turned to thank the cook. Bowed their heads as he offered thanksgiving for the nourishment which he had received. All in stunned silence.

Compared to the story of Jesus greeting Mary in the garden and convincing her that he wasn’t the gardener, or the story of Jesus walking – unrecognized for seven miles– with two disciples on Easter afternoon while explaining his entire life, or the story of Jesus meeting the disciples on the lake shore and cooking breakfast for them, this story doesn’t have a lot of glamour. Jesus appears, shows scars, eats fish and then tells them – again – what they are supposed to do.

Jesus, who had fed them so many times, who had broken bread with them, who had provided a feast for multitudes of people, turned *to them* and asked for food.

Jesus, wounded and scarred, turned to them and asked to be fed.

And in these simple actions, Jesus embodied all that he needed them to do.

Enfleshed all that he asks of us.

Jesus came to them, wounded and scarred, unannounced and unbidden.

The world will come to them, wounded and scarred, unannounced, unbidden.

The world will come to us, wounded and scarred, unannounced, unbidden.

Jesus came to them and asked for food.

The world will come to them and ask for food.

The world comes to us and asks for food.

Their job – and ours - is to be witness to the wounds and to offer nourishment in response to the wounding.

Jesus says, “Here I am – this is my identity – wounded, yet alive. Will you share your food with me?”

Unfortunately, we won’t be able to prevent much of the wounding the world inflicts. Oh, we could do better than we are. So much better.

We start small. We choose not to say the cruel word. We choose not to laugh behind someone’s back. We choose not to stereotype entire groups of people. We choose kindness over pettiness. We choose forgiveness over nursing a grudge. We don’t repeat the ugly joke that demeans and degrades.

But we could do better. So much better.

We don’t have to stand by while another mass shooting takes place. We don’t have to sigh and shrug when another person of color loses their life at the hands of law enforcement officers trained within a flawed system rooted in racism. As we add more names to the growing list… Daunte Wright and Adam Toledo. But in the aftermath, we must face the wounds, more wounds on Jesus’ body and we must be present to offer nourishment that healing might be possible.

We won’t be able to prevent the wounding that we do to one another…all the martyring, all the crucifying, all the scars.

But we could do better. So much better.

And it begins with facing the wounds and scars. Jesus’ disciples could not have stopped the momentum which was determined to carry him to the cross. Jesus wasn’t going to hide away from the world, but to be in the world as God required vulnerability – required an unsheltered stance. That vulnerability meant that his death at the hands of a misunderstanding world was inevitable.

We must reject the idea of a violent God who needed Jesus to die. We make God in our image when we proclaim a God of violence. We make God in our image when we proclaim a God of war. We make God in our image when we speak of winners and losers. We must continue to recognize the God - and the God of the whole Bible, not just the New Testament – as a God who comes in peace to restore and heal humanity, all of humanity. The resurrected Jesus is a healed and restored Jesus, but he bears the wounds of the world on his body. His body is testimony to the world’s fears and confusion, the world’s obsession with power and control, the world’s brokenness. Instead of a violent God who needed Jesus to die, let us embrace a compassionate God who has experienced our pain. We are saved by God’s love, not by the world’s violence.

The disciples must see his scars, not only because the scars confirm his identity, but also because they stand as witness to all the pain the world has known and all the pain the world will ever know. As theologian Debie Thomas writes:

I need a God who resurrects bodies.  A God who honors and even revels in physicality, who sees the danger and damage so often enacted against human flesh, and yet declares with absolute authority and credibility that our endings here and now are not The End.  For me, the physical resurrection of Jesus is God's definitive offering of both compassion and justice: all that has been taken, broken, mistreated, wronged, and forgotten, will be restored. ([Journey with Jesus - Current Essay](https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay))

We stand as witness and we feed the wounded and hungry Jesus. Do you realize what an honor that is? Jesus asks his disciples to feed him! Jesus passes on to them the responsibility of feeding, of tending, of witnessing. And he shows them how easy it is to do – to simply share from what they have.

When someone shares their woundedness with us, do we turn away? Or do we recognize that to be allowed to see their wounds is holy work? And then do we listen from them to let us know what it is they need instead of assuming we know. Jesus asked for fish – yes, it was to help them embrace his physical presence, but it was also to show them how to move forward.

To live in repentance and forgiveness as he asked them to do, as he asked them to teach to the world, perhaps it begins around a table. Can we seek salvation in our common need – our need to be known and understood, our need to be forgiven, our need to be fed? Can we find our salvation in compassion for one another’s wounds, knowing that as we have compassion for one another, we show compassion for the risen Jesus. Thanks be to the God of Easter, the God of resurrection. Amen.