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3 Easter C: John 21
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Food and Love

In today's gospel lesson, the risen Jesus once again appears to his disciples. It may sound a little mundane, given the fact that their leader came back from the dead, but his disciples have gone back to work. They are fisherman after all, and resurrection or no, glorious Easter Day or no, amazing promise of eternal life beyond this one or no, there is work to be done, hungry mouths to be fed, daily bread to be earned. And there, in the midst of their workday, Jesus meets them. He appears to his closest followers and makes them breakfast.

Food and love go together in this reading.

I am familiar with the intertwining of food and love. I had a Granny who united the two, lovingly feeding her children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren her specialties: sauerbraten and gravy, delicious dumplings that defied the laws of density and matter, apple pie that has ruined me for any other. She offered her food/love abundantly, but not quite freely. It usually came with editorial comments, unnecessary apologies: "the meat is a little dry," "the crust isn't quite right," to which the chorus of "no – it's perfect Granny, really it is" would echo in reply.

On my husband's side is my Italian grandmother, Mom Mom, who also demonstrated love by food. At my first thanksgiving with my in-laws, as Mom Mom set the turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, and rolls out in front of us, my then brand-new husband leaned over to me and whispered, "Pace yourself." Mildly amused – do I not look like I can handle the fullness of a good Thanksgiving meal? – I thought, sure, no problem. When the leftovers of the bounty of the American harvest were cleared from the table and the entire second meal of all Italian food was then brought out – manicotti, ravioli, lasagna, rigatoni, I realized the full import of his warning. Since

eating her food was my best chance to demonstrate that my words, “I love you,” were actually true, what was I to do? I still think that because my husband is thin, Mom Mom is suspect of the extent of my love for him. I should feed him more. His belly should reflect 20 years of marriage.

I can poke a bit of fun at both of these grandmothers of mine, but it is also at the table they provided that I received more than food. At the family table I learned something about who I am, what values my family held, how to talk, sometimes how to argue and how not to. I learned my family history, family stories, funny and sad. I heard some stories repeated so many times I know them by heart without even trying. I learned that food is not just fuel for the body, it can be a conveyer of meaning, a thank offering. An offering of food can be an offering of love. To eat, enjoy, savor: to accept the gift, and demonstrate love in return.

There is something about food and love that goes together. Jesus knew this too. He told his disciples to feed hungry people real physical, body-sustaining, nourishing food. But he also challenged those who followed him to learn the difference between the food that feeds the belly and what we need to feed the soul. He called himself the Bread of Life and said if we follow him, learn from him, feed on him, we will never hunger.

Jesus is, after all, the man who so loves to share a meal, and with such a random assortment of people, that his critics call him “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” Jesus multiplies loaves and fishes. He turns water into wine. When Jesus sees his fishermen disciples catching nothing all night long, he tells them to throw the nets in on the other side. They do, and they catch an abundance of fish. When Jesus wants to convey the essence of who he really is, it is to food, to the gifts of the earth, sea, and sky, rain and sunshine, harvest and catch, that Jesus turns. Wheat. Bread. Wine. In his hands, food is more than food. It is an enduring symbol of, and gift from, the one who offers his own self to meet our deepest hunger and our most relentless thirst.

On the beach at breakfast with his disciples, Jesus and Peter have their first face-to-face encounter since Peter’s denial of Jesus before the crucifixion. Three times Peter said he didn’t know Jesus when Jesus was arrested and facing certain death. “I don’t know him,” he said of the man he for whom he had walked away from his fishing boat and followed everywhere for three years. “He’s no friend of mine,” he said of Jesus of

whom he had once said, ‘You are the Messiah, the chosen one, the long awaited savior.’ “I am not with him,” he said of Jesus in front of a fire in the courtyard outside the place they had taken Jesus just before he was executed.

Now here, in front of a fire on a beach, Jesus is cooking him breakfast. “Do you love me?” he asks Peter. “Oh Jesus, you know I love you.” “Feed my lambs,” says Jesus. “Do you love me Peter?” “Lord, you know I do.” “Care for my sheep. Do you love me?” “Oh, my dear Jesus, I do. I do love you.” “Feed my sheep.” Love. Feed. Love. Feed. Love. Feed.

There is something about being a disciple in which love must get transformed into action. And from the man who couldn’t keep away from a good dinner party, who came back to make breakfast for his disciples after they had been up all night fishing, that action can be summed up in a single word: Feed.

It is so important that we are here this morning to be fed and to feed. To eat breakfast with Jesus at the table he provides. To eat the food he still gives, himself—living bread, sacred wine. To receive food for thought, reflection, struggle, and growth, in holy Scripture. To be fed.

It is so important that we are come to this place that feeds people. We feed people real, sustaining, physical food. We have outreach programs that put food on people’s tables, nourishment in children’s stomachs, that meet people’s most basic needs so they have a chance to live for more than just the next meal.

We feed people spiritual food. All are welcome at God’s table. If even a child puts their hands out for Jesus, we will put Jesus into their hands. It is so important that we will soon welcome a new director of children’s ministries—not so we can stop doing our part or not have to think about what each of us can do to benefit our children, but so we can all do a better job of welcoming the children in our midst, allowing the children to come to Jesus, letting the children lead us to recover a sense of wonder and awe at God’s good world. It is so important that we offer a confirmation program for our youth, an opportunity for them to learn more about the Christian faith and how we live as the peculiar and wonderful people we are, Episcopalians. It is so important that we feed adults by offering Sunday forum and Bible

studies and EFM and other programs so people can learn and grow, be fed, and learn how to lead others to the food that truly feeds the soul, the bread that truly satisfies – Jesus.

Come to the table this morning and have breakfast with Jesus. But if you eat, be prepared. You too may fall in love, and find yourself needing to show that love by feeding others, or at least telling other hungry people where to find a good meal.