

*The Opening of Eyes: You're Hungry Too?*

Luke 24:36-43

Every Sunday since Easter, we've been mining the New Testament stories that tell us something about how Jesus showed up to his followers after that first Easter. In a world that was as clear about the realities of life and death as we are, what was it that convinced them that Jesus was alive again, a presence that could actually be *with them*, even after they knew for sure that he'd died? What was it that made that first Christianity something more than a nostalgic retelling of stories about a person they remembered fondly?

I never expect you to be quite as into these sermon series as I am, but I hope you've noticed that there are patterns in these stories. Often Jesus identified himself by repeating words and motions he'd used before. More than once it was the disciples' discouragement or skepticism or fear that greeted Jesus; they were no more ready to believe in ghosts than we are. Today I'm noticing another pattern: how many of these stories are about food. The risen Christ was always eating!

If you were here last week, you might remember we told a story about Jesus cooking breakfast for the disciples on the beach. The week before, he joined two of them for dinner after a walk to Emmaus. Today, another story in which food makes a central appearance.

In this story, the disciples are back in a locked room. (This is another pattern; they keep locking themselves inside, and Jesus keeps walking through walls to get to them.) On this night I imagine they're talking about what they're going to do next. These guys had been together for three years. What had brought them together was a common purpose, a leader they all believed in. And now that leader was gone. So of course they're thinking about where they go from here. I'm sure there were differences among them. Some of them had dreams they'd put on hold when Jesus came and found them. Some had families who needed them back at home. Some thought they should stay together and keep trying to feed and heal people like he did, even if Jesus *wasn't* there to inspire them or make sure they did it right.

And I wonder, even as well as they knew each other, if they were completely honest in those conversations. If maybe one or two of them already felt like the business of changing the world had gotten too risky for them. Why stay around to see if the authorities would come after them too? I wonder if one or two silently thought, "I followed Jesus, but there's no way I'm staying if Peter takes over." If another said, "I like you guys, but I'm really missing my kids." So probably there's lots of stuff going on in that room, some of it spoken, some of it just hanging between them.

And all of a sudden, Jesus is there. Right there in the same room. At a moment when they weren't feeling particularly spiritual; they hadn't been praying or anything. Which I know because Luke says that their first reaction was fear. They thought they were seeing a ghost. "Don't be afraid," Jesus said to them. "It's me. See? My hands, my feet. Skin. Bones. Remember that scar I had on my right palm? Remember? It's still there. It's me."

And then he said something I'm pretty sure ghosts never say. "Do you have anything to eat? I'm hungry." He's *hungry*. So they give him a piece of leftover fish from the dinner they'd just finished and they sit together while he eats.

Of course I'm not the first person to see the conclusion you could draw from these stories: that resurrection makes you hungry. Biblical scholars, people who have poured over the Gospels for years and years, would tell us that this story is Luke's way of reminding us of what the Church believed about resurrection: that Jesus came back to life not only in his spirit, but in actual body.

But there are other things to notice too. Like how well Jesus knew these disciples, how comfortable he felt with them. How many people do you know whose house you'd walk into and immediately announce that you're hungry? Go and open their refrigerator to see what they have to snack on? I'd definitely do it at my parents' home, maybe my sisters', one or two friends'. No more. That makes me wonder how often I make politeness more important than honesty; how I hesitate before going all the way to the edge of a shared connection.

You know what else strikes me about this story? How rarely we've heard before about Jesus being hungry. He was always feeding *other* people—sometimes the disciples; sometimes four or five thousand people at a time. I think the only other time the Gospels tell us about Jesus being hungry was when he was out in the wilderness for 40 days. Even then Satan couldn't tempt him to turn stones into bread.

Now he tells the disciples he needs food, just like every human being needs food. He wants a fish taco to fill his stomach, and he's not too shy around these friends to say it out loud. In other words, he's being authentic, putting his need out there along with everything else they can see for themselves. And I wonder if it surprises them to hear it, just like it seems odd to us. Because we are inclined to divide the world up into things that are *either* spiritual or concrete and material; not both. We expect Jesus to crave *union with God*; a missed meal, not so much.

But for the rest of us, whose humanness we're not uncertain about at all, physical hunger doesn't surprise us. Spiritual need does. "I feel empty inside," is not something we say in most conversations. "I'm lost" or "I wish I could find a sense of peace about my life" are expressions of a need we don't often speak to one another. But that human need is as real as any other: food, water, air.

So maybe this story is also about naming our hunger. The resurrected Jesus is a hungry Jesus. The one who feeds others can be hungry too. What Jesus needed was a sandwich; our unmet hunger is for something else: companionship, community, connection to something that feels bigger than our little lives, a story that helps us makes sense of the random things that happen to us. Maybe that hunger too is what it means to be alive, fully human.

I think we're all hungry. People who think of themselves as 'spiritual but not religious' are hungry. Even people who are not religious at all, who never think about church or something named God, are hungry. What differentiates people of faith, what sets you apart, isn't your hunger; it's that you've found something that fills your stomach. D.T. Niles, the Sri Lankan who

spent his life as a Methodist missionary in the leper colonies of Hawaii, used to say, ‘Speaking about faith is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.’

Sometimes we think that until we know everything, until we’ve worked out all our questions or have studied in depth the religion we’re trying to follow, we’re not “qualified” to open our mouths about it. Until we’re sure we’ve gotten it “right”, we think, we should just keep the faith we’re working on inside our heads.

But you know what? Saying things out loud is how we come to understand what we believe. It’s a lot like falling in love. Putting unformed thoughts and unexplainable feelings into words is what gives them content, shape, definition.

Maybe you can try it. I’m not suggesting that you name-drop Jesus into all your conversations. Recognizing what is authentic God-talk involves recognizing what is not. There’s a lot of God *chatter*, using God’s name in a way that doesn’t convey a real experience at all. A mountain climber who says, “We’ll make it to the top, God willing,” is probably referring to weather rather than his beliefs. Same with whoever wrote the phrase “acts of God” into your insurance policy or “In God We Trust” on coins. When I hear “God bless the United States of America” at the end of every political speech, that sounds to me more like a ceremonial use of God’s name than it does an expression of faith.

Many of us have let the misuse of religious language stop us from speaking about our faith altogether. We’ve decided to be doers instead of talkers. We love that advice of St. Francis: “Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words.” It’s true—most of the time, we bear witness to the truth of what we believe in mostly silent ways. Every day we speak wordlessly about what we believe in: when we stop to notice someone who is un-lovely, or insist on doing our work with integrity, or treat someone with kindness even when we’re annoyed or frustrated.

But there are times when a silent witness is not enough. Sometimes actions alone are not complete; words *are* called for. It can be *in*-authentic to leave out of your conversation the part that says you serve at Hope’s Corner because service is how you follow the example of Jesus. That you vote the way you do on a ballot proposition because God created a world where *every* living being is meant to flourish. That when you are most discouraged, the memory of how you were unexpectedly, gracefully, lifted up before is what helps you raise your eyes again.

We need practice speaking authentically about our experience of God without sounding like we’ve filled our mouths with somebody else’s words, or like we’re speaking French for the first time since high school. We need authentic God-talk.

Maybe it starts with talking, not in church but out there, about what you’re hungry for. The things you long for. What you need. If we can learn to talk authentically about our *own* need for the food that feeds our souls, we’re helping other people identify their hunger too. And then, what if we could say, “But I’ve found something that fills my hunger, at least sometimes.”

What if some hungry person, or maybe a whole hungry world, has just been waiting for you to offer?