

## **Following Jesus' Lead**

Luke 24:36-48 Crossroads Christian Church

Acts 3:12-19

April 19, 2015 Easter 3B

One of the great things that I will always remember about the Crossroads Christian Church is that you eat well; you cook well; you really enjoy eating together; and that eating together is a highlight of your church life. Since I enjoy a good meal as well as the next person, I fit in real well here. Today's gospel lesson helps us remember that eating together isn't just about fun and fellowship, it's also about faith. We're living out our theology when we eat in the Fellowship Hall or go out for dinner, just like we're living out our theology when we come to this table, the communion table.

In our Gospel lesson from Luke, Jesus Christ appeared among his disciples, and just like in last week's story from John, they panicked, like they'd seen a ghost. And Jesus said, "Peace be with you." Well. That was easier for him to say than them to feel. Hadn't they seen him die? Wasn't this a memorial service, and the guest of honor who they had assumed was dead was standing and inviting them to calm down and to check him out? Then he surprised them again by asking for something to eat. They offered him a piece of boiled fish, and he ate it in front of them. Partly, maybe, it was to prove that he was really alive, not just a spirit or apparition. But I'm sure that it also reminded them of a time years before, before all the troubles started, when he invited them to feed the hungry crowds that had gathered to hear him teach—and he fed them with bread, and fish. I'm sure it reminded them of all the other meals they had together, including the last meal in the upper room when he had broken bread, and reminded them of his body; poured the cup, and reminded them of the blood of the new covenant. And hadn't two followers just come back and told them about the stranger they had met on the road to Emmaus, and how he revealed himself to be the Messiah in the way he broke bread? Is it any wonder that we've been having communion meals and potlucks ever since?

Jesus went on to interpret the scriptures, so they could see God's resurrection power in its pages. He made the old words come alive, and seem new again. Then he invited them to be a part of telling the good news. It was a wonderful, amazing,

awesome experience that stretched the disciples farther than they had ever been stretched before.

Fred Craddock tells this story. "When I was a boy, once I was taken out of the house and to the backyard and was allowed to lie on the grass and chew the tender stems of grass. You know how you do on a summer evening, just lie there, chew the tender grass, and look up at the sky. And my father said to me, "Son, how far can you think?"

I said, "What?"

He said, "How far can you think?"

"Well, I don't know what you mean."

"Just think as far as you can think up toward the stars."

I screwed my imagination down, and I said, "I'm thinking. . . I'm thinking . . . I'm thinking."

He said, "Think as far as you can think."

"I'm thinking as far as I can think."

He said, "Well, drive down a stake out there now. In your mind, drive down a stake. Have you driven down the stake? That's how far you can think."

I said, "Yes, sir."

He said, "Now what's on the other side of your stake?"

I said, "Well, there's more sky."

He said, "Move your stake."

And we spent the evening moving my stake out there. It was a crazy thing to do, but I will never thank him enough for doing it."<sup>1</sup> (unquote)

Something much the same happened with the disciples of Jesus. They heard him teach in new and wonderful ways, not dependent on the authority of others, but with his own authority. They stood in wonder. And Jesus moved the stake. They saw Jesus forgive sinners and heal sick people. They stood in wonder. And Jesus moved the stake. They heard Jesus say that they would go out and do the same kinds of things that he did. They stood in wonder. And Jesus moved the stake. They even saw Jesus raise people from the dead. They stood in wonder. And Jesus moved the stake. Then, when others rose up against him, they saw Jesus crucified and buried. While they were coping with their grief came the news of the empty tomb. They stood in wonder. And Jesus moved the stake.

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Craddock, *Craddock Stories* (Chalice, 2001), pp. 123-124.

When somebody moves the stake, makes us think in a new way, challenges our status quo, we sometimes respond in doubt, confusion, anger, or fear. Is it any wonder that the disciples responded like that when they encountered the resurrected Christ? Is it any wonder that when he appeared in their midst and said, "Peace be with you," they weren't peaceful at all, they were panic-stricken? They had heard him teach about the resurrection, but they still couldn't comprehend it, even when he was right there with them. So Jesus reassured them, ate with them, interpreted scriptures with them, and challenged them. They had been plunged into an unknown future, and he showed them how it all connected back to their past. And he ended up saying, "You are my witnesses of these things."

And, just as we heard last week, too, from John, something happened to them that day. They stopped being disciples—learners—and became apostles—ambassadors. They were to preach; to teach; to heal; to tell the good news, just as Jesus had done. Our lesson from Acts shows an example of the new apostles doing just that—Peter and John, who had run away terrified at Jesus' arrest, stood up bravely before the council, defending their actions of healing a crippled man in Jesus' name, and told them why they could not stop preaching the good news.

Do you know what? That story still continues. The apostle's marching orders are our marching orders. A few years back, WWJD—What would Jesus Do?—became a catch phrase. And basically, the answer to that question is WJD—what Jesus did. Jesus healed in amazing ways. We can help bring healing, also, by being a caring presence when people are ill. Jesus forgave sinners. We can forgive those who sin against us. Jesus fed the hungry. We can give to the food bank, and work for changes in government policy so that hunger fighting programs aren't cut. Jesus told the good news of God's grace and love. We can share the good news by inviting people to church and sharing our own faith story, and by acting in a gracious, loving manner. We can share the good news by our financial support of the church's ministry. We can share the good news by teaching our children and grandchildren the way of faith. So be in mission. Follow the lead of the risen savior, Jesus Christ. And just as the risen Christ appeared to the disciples and reassured them of his real presence by eating a piece of fish, so the risen Christ is with us now. We know him in breaking bread and drinking from the cup,

and there we find our strength to do his will and his work in the world. Amen.

By Michael E. Dixon