
Come and Have Breakfast

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A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler
Atlanta, Georgia
The Third Sunday of Easter (Year C)

Jesus said to the disciples, "Come, and have breakfast." -John 21:12

What does the word "resurrection" mean?

Does the word "resurrection" mean something supernatural? Does it mean something historical? Does it mean coming back to life? Does it mean breathing life back into dead bones and flesh?

It might very well mean all those things. Sometimes, however, the more we try to define it, the more our answers get us tangled up in a jumble of definitions, and etymologies, and word meanings.

Today, I want to give it a try. I want to talk about words, and this word, "resurrection." I suggest we review the very words of Jesus for a possibility of what resurrection means.

Among all the pithy sayings of Jesus after his resurrection, let's start with what Jesus did *not* say. If a lesser man had shown up resurrected in the upper room on that first day of the week, a lesser man would have had every right to be upset. Jesus had been falsely accused, he had been torn and tortured, he had been abandoned by friends, he had suffered.

But notice this, if you notice nothing else about the resurrection words of Jesus. Notice this: Jesus did not return with words of accusation and revenge. A lesser man might have asked, "What happened to y'all?" "Why did you let me die?" "Why did you run away?" "What kind of disciple can you ever be?"

Those would have been the words of revenge and violence. Those would have been words to spread the virus that has been with humanity from the beginning of time. The virus of violence. The words of blame and revenge in our lives are the words which perpetuate the virus of violence.

Jesus appears to his disciples with no blame, with not even any passive-aggressive wondering about where they were. The resurrected Jesus refuses violence. The resurrected Jesus speaks words of life. Jesus breaks the cycle of violence when he is resurrected.

If we came to church last week, we heard the resurrection Jesus say, "Peace be with you." And then he said, "if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven." Those are the words of release and life, the words of resurrection.

Today in church, we hear Jesus go even further. After a breakfast one day, Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me more than these?" Peter responds, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus says, "Feed my lambs." Then the interchange is repeated. A second time, Jesus asks, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter says, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love

you." Jesus says, "Tend my sheep."

Finally, a third time Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?" He is starting to sound like a teenaged lover at the dance. This time, Peter feels hurt because Jesus has asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" Peter says, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you." Jesus says a third time, "Feed my sheep."

Those of you who have heard commentary on this passage over the years, probably know that this conversation is actually a bit more complicated than the translation indicates. Since the beginning of Christendom, we have noted that Jesus and Peter are actually using different Greek words for "love." When Jesus asks Peter the first two times about loving him, Jesus is using the lofty, divine word for "love," the word *agape*. But Peter is responding, "Yes I love you," with another word for love, the Greek word *phileo*.

Jesus is asking Peter, "Do you love me with divine, self-giving love?" But Peter is responding, "Yes, I love you with brotherly love." At the third question, Jesus actually changes to *phileo*, "brotherly love, instead of divine love" and, according to some, this is what hurts Peter.

Might there be some hidden meaning in the contrast between the two words? Some Dan Brown secret? Yes, there could be. C. S. Lewis wrote a masterpiece describing four different Greek words for love; it was the book, *The Four Loves*. But even with those nuanced meanings, C.S. Lewis concludes that each word for love has a holy component.

There is no hidden meaning in the various translations of the word "love" here, or in this feast of other words either. It is one word with many nuances. It is one food with many flavors. Sometimes the tongue tastes one thing, and sometimes the tongue tastes another.

When Peter heard Jesus ask the question, "Do you love me?" he probably heard every variation of meaning that the word can contain. He tasted every flavor of it, and he saw every hue in the color of love. Every minister of the gospel, every follower of God, whether you are lay person, deacon, priest, or bishop, hears that same question: "Do you love me?" And it is fair, it is part of the meal, to interpret that question in all sorts of ways.

Every one of us, even when we have studied the classical definitions "eros, agape, philio, storge" has a different definition of what it means to love. No matter how we interpret the question, the directive of Jesus is the same: Feed my sheep. Take care of my people. Love my people. No matter how we might trip and tangle ourselves in the question, the directive of Jesus is the same. Feed my sheep.

Everyone in this room is a minister. Everyone in this room is called to feed somebody. But we will all feed differently. Some of you feed with exquisite recipes and fine spices. Some of you feed with the latest in nutritious organics. Some of you feed with the same delightful dishes your mother, your grandmother, taught you long ago. Every vocation is called to feeding: bankers and lawyers, poets and politicians.

Good feeding is like good cooking; it doesn't happen by magic. It takes work. It takes exercise. It takes practice. Cooking does not come without knowing ingredients and chemistry "how this taste reacts with that spice, how long it takes for bread to rise. "Feed my sheep" means taking the time to learn how to do it well.

It takes a lot of love to learn the flavors, to learn the cultures, to learn the recipes. That's why Christians do so much better when we actually love something. Christians do better when we love to sing, when we love to cook, when we love to feed "when we love our people, when we love Jesus.

"Feed my sheep" is the directive of Jesus for anyone, anyone, who wants to follow in the resurrection footsteps of Jesus. "Do you love me?" Jesus asked. "Do you love God?" Then feed somebody. And feed them well.

Here is what I offer today "another sort of definition for what the word "resurrection" means. Today, the word "resurrection" means breakfast. Just as important as anything else Jesus said after his resurrection were these four simple words: "Come and have breakfast."

Breakfast. Breakfast is the meal which opens the day, which appears at the transition of time, which turns darkness into light. It breaks the fast, the fast of emptiness and death.

Jesus invites people to come and share food together, especially when they haven't had any good food lately.

And there is nothing so welcome after a dark night, perhaps after a night of fishing without result, perhaps after a night of dark dreams, perhaps after a night of division, to hear the words of Jesus, "Come and have breakfast."

Breakfast might mean good old southern scrambled eggs with bacon. Maybe grits warmed over a stove for an hour. Maybe breakfast means healthy yogurt and granola. Maybe fresh blueberries and strawberries. Pancakes and maple syrup. Maybe a bagel with cream cheese. Maybe whole grain toast and honey. Maybe fresh fish, fried or broiled this morning, from the sea. Maybe just bracing black coffee.

But breakfast always means something that wakes us up. Something that feeds us after a dark night. Something that opens our eyes when our dreams have been nightmares, and when the night has not let us sleep at all. Breakfast means fresh and new life. Breakfast means resurrection.

AMEN.

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