
The Resurrection Means Breakfast

A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Third Sunday of Easter – Year C

Jesus said to the disciples, “Come, and have breakfast.”—John 21:12

For the record, we have lots of things Jesus said after his resurrection. During these Sundays of the Easter season, the Sundays after Easter Day, we hear a lot of them. But there’s one thing he said, one wonderful thing, that I might like the best. I will get to it in a few minutes.

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. Exhilarating, life-changing words.

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 (and many of us have), you probably know that this conversation is actually a bit more complicated than the translation indicates. Since the beginning of Christendom, people 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*, which means, generally, “brotherly” love.

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 his word for love to *phileo*,—brotherly love, instead of divine love—and, according to some, this is what hurts Peter: “Do you love me with brotherly love?”

Might there be some hidden meaning in the contrast between the two words? Some Dan Brown secret? Well, I suppose 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.

Here is my conclusion: 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, “love,” with many nuances. It is one food with many flavors. Sometimes the tongue tastes one thing, and sometimes the tongue tastes another. *Agape. Phileo.*

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 of these words for love—*eros, agape,*

phileo, 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, your family, taught you long ago. Every vocation is called to some kind of feeding: even 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 things. 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 asks. "Do you love God?" Then feed somebody. And feed them well.

As critical as those words are, I marvel at something else that Jesus says in the gospel today. Just as important as anything else Jesus said after his resurrection were these four simple words: "Come and have breakfast."

Those might be the words I like the best. Today, the word "resurrection" might mean "breakfast!" This line might just be another definition of what resurrection means. Does resurrection mean new body, new spirit, new life? Well, the word "resurrection" means "breakfast." "Come and have breakfast."

Breakfast is the meal which opens the day, which appears at the transition of time, which turns darkness into light. You may realize that the word, "breakfast" is two words: "break" and "fast." Breakfast breaks the fast, the fast of emptiness and death. The resurrection is breakfast.

At breakfast, 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, perhaps after a night of pandemic – nothing so welcome than to hear the words of Jesus, "Come and have breakfast." The resurrection is breakfast.

Breakfast might mean good old southern scrambled eggs with bacon. Maybe grits warmed over the stove for an hour. Maybe breakfast means healthy yogurt and granola. Maybe fresh blueberries and strawberries. Oatmeal. Pancakes and maple syrup. Maybe a bagel with cream cheese. Salmon and capers. Maybe whole grain toast and honey. Maybe fresh fish, fried or broiled this morning, from the sea. I hear that some parts of the country eat hash browns for breakfast. Maybe just bracing black coffee. There are lots of valid tastes for breakfast.

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, new life. Breakfast means resurrection. The resurrection means breakfast. Come and have breakfast.

AMEN.

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