

Foodie Jesus

A Message for Sunday Morning Worship on Communion Sunday
United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT

May 1, 2016

Text: Luke 24:33-43

So, what's your favorite food? What's your favorite thing to eat? When you come home after a long day and you are just starving, what is it that you crave? (pause for responses) I guess I'd answer that question in a couple of ways, depending on my mood. And the time of year. If it's dinner time at the end of a hot summer day, I love a huge salad chock full of the freshest veges with some ranch dressing and some cold chicken or lean roast beef for good measure. A nice piece of brown bread along with a glass of merlot, and I am happy for sure. If it's a winter's night, when the sun has slipped below the horizon before 5pm and the temperatures struggle to reach above freezing, then hand me a big bowl of homemade soup – beef vegetable, chili, ham and bean, chicken rice – it doesn't really matter. Just a big bowl of hot, steamy goodness accompanied by a nice piece of brown bread and a glass of cabernet and I'm on the verge of purring.

That being said, sometimes you just need dessert. You know what I'm saying??? Sometimes you just crave sweet and that, dear friends, is truly taking the first step on the road that leads to perdition and an extra turn on the exercise bike, at least for me. My particular weakness in the valley of temptation of sweet is –

chocolate. Anything chocolate. Cake, cookies, brownies. Dark chocolate candy because, you know, dark chocolate is good for you so it's okay to eat it. Heck, you should eat it! Or so I want to believe. Chocolate was the key coping mechanism for one of TV's more famous female cops, Deputy Chief Brenda Lee Johnson on *The Closer*. It was always a good show with an engaging plot line but what I loved the most about Brenda Lee was the drawer full of chocolate candy she raided whenever she had a fight with her boss, or couldn't get a suspect to confess or had to overcome some barrier to her successful investigation of yet another crime. I could really relate to that desk drawer of chocolate in her office, especially because I won't allow myself to have one. The one snack in my desk drawer is a low fat 90 calorie energy bar. Sigh.

So, we all have those foods we love to eat, foods we are drawn to in different situations, foods we have to have at particular moments in life. That is very human. And the fact that we are in a position to satisfy those cravings without too much difficulty is testimony to how privileged a life we are blessed to live. For us, going without food is most likely because we are on a diet of some sort, not because there is no food to be had. Or perhaps it's because we have to fast before a particular medical test or procedure, not because hunger is a way of life. We forget what a blessing it is to be able to eat the foods we want to eat when we want to eat them. In the midst of our plenty we forget

that too many of our brothers and sisters live every day with life threatening scarcity. Refugees and displaced persons around the world – and there are more of them at those moment in time than at any other time in history – these people who have no homes, also have no food and no water and no medical care. These people are in these situations not because they want to be, not because they want a handout or a free ride in a more prosperous country. They are in these situations because it was just not safe to stay at home when home is in the middle of a war zone and you never know who the enemy is. Hunger is not the same thing as being hungry for a favorite food. Hunger is a threat to life and we forget that at our peril.

But how do we solve the problem of hunger? What can we do, as individuals and as a church, to make hunger a distant memory right here in our own community, never mind around the world? It's true that we do a lot already, like our recent "Fill the Pews" food drive for the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center and our monthly meals for the WARM Center. Folks who have participated in our mission trips have picked vegetables in support of the local community food banks of RI. We've served meals – dinner on Friday and breakfast on Sunday – to the homeless and near homeless on the streets of Providence. Those were great experiences, wonderful days, where we learned so much about poverty, homelessness and hunger right around us.

It is not a world away for sure. Poverty, homelessness and hunger are right here, right down the road. And we forget that at our peril because when we forget that, we are forgetting Jesus' teaching about what theologians call "the Great Reversal," that whole idea that the last shall be first and the first shall be last.

Jesus talks about it a lot but it's especially easy to see in one particular story which Luke records earlier in his Gospel. It's about a rich man and beggar named Lazarus. Now this isn't Lazarus, Jesus' good friend, but another Lazarus, a very poor man who was homeless, hungry and sick. Lazarus spent his time on a street outside the home of a very rich man who walked by him pretending not to notice him every day. Lazarus would dream of eating the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table onto the floor but even that was denied him. Soon he died and was taken up to heaven. Funny thing is the rich man also died the same night but he found himself in Hades where he suffered terribly. He looked up to heaven and who should he see there but that poor dirty beggar Lazarus! He pleaded that Lazarus be sent down to him with a cool sip of water, but the answer was no. "You had your chance to be kind to Lazarus when he needed your help and you ignored him," he heard. "It's your turn to be ignored."

Yikes! That's harsh! Not like the Jesus we think we know. But Jesus was making a point in this powerful and vivid story—that when we can help, we should help. We should also note we

know the name of the hungry man – Lazarus. But we don't know the name of the rich man. Perhaps that's Jesus way of diminishing the man even more. Perhaps its Jesus way of reminding us that sometimes we are all like the rich man who forgets the poor looking for crumbs. The Great Reversal indeed.

So, how is all this connected to today's story about Jesus in the Gospel of Luke? Well, the connective tissue is present in all those food references which are part and parcel of the appearance of the Resurrected Jesus to the 11 and their companions. Today's story comes immediately after the story we looked at last week when Jesus walked alongside two followers, Cleopas and his friend, for seven miles and they didn't recognize him until he broke and blessed the bread. Then Jesus just disappears. Cleopas and friend immediately take off back to Jerusalem to tell the 11 what had happened. And, just as they when they get to the part of the story where they recognize Jesus in the blessing and breaking of the bread, Jesus suddenly appears! Right there with them in the upper room!! Needless to say, the disciples and the people with them were stunned. Jesus told them not to be afraid, to touch him so they would see for themselves that he was flesh and bone, not a spirit. He was alive again and standing right in the middle of them and all of their fears. And they didn't know what to think. "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering," Luke says. And that's when Jesus cinches the deal.

And he does it by asking for something to eat. “Have you anything here to eat?” Jesus asks. And the scramble begins to find him something and it ends up being some broiled fish.

Okay, let’s stop for a minute and think about these two instances of the Resurrected Jesus and food. First he is recognized in the blessing and breaking of bread. Then he is proved alive by the consuming of fish. Bread and fish. Sound familiar? It should. These are the menu items of one of Jesus’ most incredible miracles, the only one to appear in all four Gospels – the feeding of the 5000. So in these two simple yet powerful actions, both of them connected to food, Jesus is reminding the 11, their friends and us too who he is, what he has taught them, and most importantly, what he is capable of. Do not doubt who I am and what I can accomplish, Jesus is telling them and he’s telling them through concrete, physical action.

So, what is this story of the Resurrected Jesus saying to us? How is Foodie Jesus, or Hungry Jesus, speaking to us as he blesses the bread and munches on broiled fish? I think he’s saying a couple of things and it’s pretty much the same thing he said to those who encountered him in that long ago upper room. First, he’s saying fear not. I know this is crazy, he says. I know this doesn’t make sense but I’m here, alive again, thanks to the miracle of the grace of God. Second, he’s saying “I’m so alive again that I’m hungry and I want to eat with you. I want us to

gather again around that special table where we've eaten bread together and shared wine together." Jesus told the disciples to remember always that special meal they shared together during the Passover and he's reminding them again in an incredible way. Finally, he's reminding them through the bread and the fish that miracles happen every day. He's a miracle for sure, but so is each of them. So is each of us, because if we truly believe that with God all things are possible, then we know we can be the instruments of the miracles the world needs.

We can be a part of solving the world's hunger problem. And we can do that in more ways than collecting canned goods and picking produce on a hot summer day, important as those are. We can do that through our Pollinator Garden project because pollinators are responsible for two out of every three bites of food we eat each day! Claire taught us that last week and that's amazing! Pollinators are responsible for two out of every three bites of food we eat each day. And someone needs to feed the pollinators whose natural food sources are disappearing along with their natural habitats at an alarming rate. We can create our own miracle right here, right now on our own property! Who knew? With God all things are possible. And I think Foodie Jesus is pretty excited about it too. How about you? Amen.