



Do You Eat Fish?

TEXT
Luke 24:36–43

August 21, 2016 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

We can't be surprised to find Jesus eating again. He ate his way through his ministry with a wide variety of dinner guests; so why should we be surprised if he eats in the resurrection?

It is a bizarre story: Jesus meeting with his anxious followers and asking them for something to eat. But it is a resurrection story, and there is no way to tell a resurrection story without it being bizarre.

He appears to them. They touch his hands and feet. He has Bible study with them. And he asks them for something to eat. They gave him some fish. Do you like fish?

There are two things about this story that I find instructive and important.

The first is the emphasis that Jesus places on insisting that he is himself. "Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself," he says.

Why is this necessary? I think this is making a theological point about resurrection.

If I understand the text, the testimony of the faith is that death does not have the power to destroy us. We are not lost.

Whatever it is that makes you *you* is what God holds on to. The love of God will never let go of you — and even on the far side of death, we are able to say, "See, it is I myself." We are not lost.

Fred Craddock is a preacher in the Disciples Church. He spent most of his life laboring at Chandler Seminary in Atlanta trying to teach preachers how to preach, which is no easy task. He tells a story of how he and his sisters would pass the small town summers by playing games. One of his favorite games was hide-and-seek. Fred loved this game because he's a rather small man, and was a small kid, giving him considerable advantages when hiding.

He says he could hide in places that his sisters didn't know were places. He remembers the day he crawled under the front steps. He got under the very bottom step off the porch. His brothers and sisters were running up and down those steps looking for him. He was hiding there; it was dark down there.

He was thinking: "They will never find me, they will never find me, they will never find me." Then it dawned on him: "They will never find me."

Fred said that pretty soon, he would stick a toe out from under the steps. His sister would scream, "I found you!"

"Aw shucks, you found me."

You see even in that game, we may think what we want is to hide, but what we really want is to be found.

There is a deep human need to know that I won't be lost, my life, my personality; that in the resurrection, we will be able to say, "See, it is I myself."

Death neither has the power to erase us nor to pull us from God. But neither do we just become absorbed into the holy, like a drop of water joining the ocean.

This is because resurrection is the work of love, and love is always particular. We love people with a name and a face and a story.

"See, it is I myself."

Resurrection is love language. It is the final work of God's love. God loves with a love that holds on to us.

We were at Disney World in Orlando. The kids were elementary ages. There was a climbing station with ropes and tunnels and nets that seemed to reach four stories high. Nathan was all over it. Parents stood at

the bottom and watched. There he is. Then no, he's over there. It was great fun. You couldn't see the entire contraption, but you could see parts of it — most of it.

After some time, I realized it had been a while since I had seen Nathan. I worked my eyes from one end of the play station to the other. I couldn't find him. I told myself, he has to be up there. But I couldn't see him.

I called his name; no answer. I yelled his name; no answer. Like a grown-up diving into the ball pit at McDonalds, I started my adult self up into the ropes and tunnels and slides. No Nathan.

You obviously know it worked out okay, but for the longest six minutes of my life, I worried that he was lost. I couldn't abide it.

I think God is like that. Resurrection is God's last work of love because God simply could not abide you being lost. But resurrection is more than that. It is also the promise that you are not the same.

He asked them, "Do you have anything to eat?" I can't imagine that they could eat with him and not remember all the times they had eaten with him.

The last time was in that upper room — bread that he broke and the cup that he poured. He told them this world would break his body, but not his love; and that's exactly what they were seeing.

There was that meal at Levi's house. Do you remem-

ber Levi the tax collector? He showed his followers that he would not treat unrighteous people the way we do. We want to keep our distance, but not Jesus. He goes right where the brokenness is. That's his M.O.

And there was the feeding of the 5,000. Luke says that it happened in Bethsaida. Jesus' followers wanted him to send them away — *them*, it's a lonely word. Jesus couldn't do that because to him, they weren't *them*; they were *us*.

He visited with Mary and Martha. It reminds us that sometimes — and particularly when the world is falling apart — we need to listen to Jesus.

And there was his meal with Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus spent every day practicing his faith. He took care of the poor; he was fair in his work, just. And he trusted that someday salvation would come. A lot had happened at table.

What Jesus revealed at table was how life was to be lived, how it would be lived. At table, we see the world as it is, but we also see the world as the power of God's love will make it. When Jesus is at table with us, we get a taste of our future.

At his table, relationship is claimed, friendship is practiced, grace is served, forgiveness is tasted. At his table, our best self is known.

This is what I'm trying to say: The resurrection is not just life that doesn't stop. That actually wouldn't be good news. It is life that is redeemed. We finally become the one God intended us to be.

Lately I have been thinking about time. What happens to us is that we spend our whole lives becoming ourselves. We spend a lifetime becoming the person we are. This is what I mean.

When I was 8 years old, I got a baseball glove for Christmas. It's all I wanted. I also got some model cars. They were the plastic kind that you glued together and painted. I enjoyed that, but I never cared about cars.

Baseball was all that mattered. I played second base when I was that age. When I was a kid, you could play baseball without it being a full-time job, and I loved it. At 8 years old, I thought school was a waste of time. I thought sisters were a creation flaw. I thought Pop-Tarts were real food. When it came to church, my mother didn't have to put me in a harness to make me go anymore. So there's progress! I was pretty happy when I was 8. I suppose there is still a hint of that little boy in me, but I've grown a lot.

By the time I was 16, I had changed. For Christmas that year, there was a small box with my name on it; and in it, I found a car key! I was so excited — but then less excited when I recognized it as the key to my mother's car. It was a '67 Mercury station wagon with wood-grain paneling on the side. I both wanted and didn't want my friends to see me drive that car.

But that was also the year that I got my first guitar. It was a very secondhand Yamaha,

with steel strings. I played it every day.

Sixteen was a good time. I was long past my baseball playing days. Already the glove was stiff from lack of use. When I was 16, I thought school was something I would be finished with soon. How much more could there be to learn?

I thought girls were God's greatest invention. I had dreams of growing up to be a musician. I had hair past my shoulders and about as much ambition as an aardvark. Every day after school I would go to Baskin Robbins and get a mint chocolate chip milkshake. I thought that was real food. When it came to church, I was there enough that more than anywhere else, I felt at home. I was a reasonably happy kid at 16.

I suppose there are still whispers of that 16-year-old kid in me, but he's hard to find these days.

I'm in my mid-50s now. (How did that happen?) I still love baseball, but it's not important. I'd go to school a little bit every day now ... if I could. I have, for the first time, begun to worry that I won't have time to read all the books I want to read before I die.

Just having a few moments with my kids at our table — or just having a few moments with you at this one — I've learned that's what food is for.

And if at age 8 or 16 you would have told me that this is who I would be, it would have been impossible for me to imagine. The mystery is that I

am both at the same time; I am and am not that little 8-year-old boy. I am that kid, and I am not that kid. It takes a lifetime for us to become who we are. I think resurrection means that process comes to completion. We still aren't finished.

We will say, "See, it is I myself" — and it will be the self that God always knew we could be.

So, of course, Jesus asks, "Do you have anything to eat?" I want to eat with you — because when Jesus is at table, that grace is served, that hope is known, and we get a taste of our future.

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.