



Hungry Jesus

TEXT
Luke 24:36–43

August 21, 2016 — Sermon by Rev. Hallie M. Hottle

All summer long, we've been working our way through the gospel of Luke, reading all these eating stories. Someone once said that in Luke, Jesus is always on his way to a meal, on his way from a meal or sitting at the table. Or as I like to say it, Jesus is hungry. He comes to dinner over and over again, and there is always something to learn when he does.

And today is the *last* day of these table stories. So on this last week of table talk, I've been thinking about my own dinner stories — thinking about the meals I've had that I can remember most.

The one I remember most recently was just exactly one year ago last week. I was in Haiti to work at an orphanage with a team from the last church I served. We were staying at the home of a church member, who had moved to Miami and maintained his home in the village to host volunteers when we came.

Into the second day of our 10-day stay, there was a problem with the generator. So, long story short, all the food we had meticulously packed in

checked luggage was spoiled, announcing itself with a smell that wafted through the 100-degree house. All our food was destroyed except rice, Doritos, peanut butter and non-refrigerated bacon bits.

Our host was really sorry for this, but told us not to worry. He nonchalantly said he had some meat out back. It took them a moment, but when our teens realized he was talking about the cute little goat they had been playing with earlier, a small battle broke out. It ended in negotiating eating the chickens waking us up every morning instead of the goat, who then ended up inside with us for protection.

So our mealtimes became something of a comedy sketch: our group eating chicken with rice, bacon bits and Doritos sprinkled on top, and me, the vegetarian allergic to meat, feasting on peanut butter and rice. I will never forget those meal times, where we became anything but full and were content anyway.

And then I remember the meals I was invited to in my first months serving that church in Miami, where people were unknowingly feeding me meals I couldn't have otherwise had.

The church had done some bad math and was paying me only slightly more than the rent of the apartment they had put me in. I was ending the month without enough money for groceries, relying on youth group pizza and the gift of mangoes from people's yards to get me through. The gracious people who invited me for dinner in those early months didn't know they were feeding me food I otherwise would have been hungry for, and I will forever be grateful for their invites.

There was the time, about a year and a half ago, when three young adults and I traveled to the Arizona/Mexico border to attempt to better understand all that happens there. We spent a day walking miles and miles into the Mexican desert with members of our PCUSA border ministry team, filling water containers that line the dry river beds that migrants walk attempting to reach the U.S. We learned of the pains that journey entails — pains including dehydration that kill many before they make it. And we heard from our Christian brothers and sisters who acknowledge that immigration issues must be solved, but that while there are human beings

dying in the desert, they will make sure the water continues to flow.

It was after one of those desert walks that we sat in the sand to eat food prepared right there in the back of a truck. Never have beans and tortillas tasted so good! Everything we ate was topped with prickly pear cactus, and when our host was prodded on how she prepared the prickly food, she said, in a mix of Spanish and English, some of the best cooking *and life* advice I've ever received: "You just have to work around the pricks and try not to get stuck."

And there were the meals I remember from growing up. I had a grandma who gave me all of her cooking genes — which are absolutely zero. She couldn't cook and neither can I. But she'd roast a hot dog on the stove and serve it with her fine silver, and I swear the setting made it taste better. She'd pour way too much sugar on already sugared cereal and make me promise not to tell dad, and always believed that dessert should be eaten first. Mealtimes at her house were non-nutritional, fantastical experiences.

So I've been thinking about this this week, recounting my most memorable meals — which I encourage you to try too — and it occurred to me that none of them are meals that I have served or hosted myself. The meal times that have engrained themselves into my head and heart have never been from moments when I

have been the one to create the guest list. They've always been the times when I've been the guest.

And if we look back through all the stories in the gospel of Luke we've examined this summer, I think Jesus would say the same.

In every single story we have heard, Jesus is *always* the guest at the table. He was invited to Levi's house, to the scoffs of the Pharisees. He was invited to the Pharisees' table — twice. The 5,000 were fed by his miracle, with the disciples hosting as he told them, "You give them something to eat." He ate with Mary and Martha, who argued over the best hosting practices. He invited himself to eat with Zacchaeus. And last week, he walked to Emmaus, where he was begged to come inside for dinner.

Jesus is always the *guest* at the table. There is only one exception to this pattern. On Jesus' last night with his followers, before he was arrested and tried and crucified, he invited the disciples to dinner. On that night alone, he served as host, offering himself as the bread of life and cup of salvation.

Except for that night, that one important night, he was always the guest.

So much of our language as Christians in this time and place involves hostess language. We speak of inviting all to the table, of being welcoming and open, of serving all and feeding all. And the work

of the host is good and holy work. But I wonder this week, as we follow the One who continually shows up as *guest*, if we've overlooked that calling as sacred too.

Following Christ to the guest seat will lead us to unexpected tables; it will ask us to respond to inconvenient invites; it will serve us food we didn't plan to eat, and might leave us staring at a goat on our plate. The work of being *guest* is challenging, and it's especially challenging to people who are more comfortable holding the guest list. It's challenging in this world that praises our serving over our ability to be served. It's challenging for people who can hear the call to invite the hungry and rarely consider themselves the ones who need to eat.

Despite the challenges in being a guest, Jesus consistently chooses this way. In today's text, Jesus doesn't even wait for the formality of invites. He shows up and just asks for some food. I think Jesus is hungry. And I think it's remarkably easier to be a guest when you're hungry.

The idea of taking a spoonful of peanut butter and mixing it with white rice actually makes my stomach churn. But for eight days in Haiti, I had no trouble eating it. Playing with and carrying ailing children all day will make you hungry enough to eat about anything.

And I have eaten prickly pear cactus since we were in that Mexican desert. In fact, when we returned from that

trip, we sought out a restaurant with prickly pear on the menu, craving the food we had loved so much. And we couldn't figure out why it wasn't as good. We even bought a dang cactus and attempted to make it ourselves, working around the pricks and trying not to get stuck, of course. But it hasn't tasted the same without the walk in the desert, the heat and the hunger.

And there were times in my later years serving that church in Miami when people invited me to dinner, and I didn't go. I had excuses, good excuses. Our programs had grown and more people meant more work. I was busy and tired. But truth be told, once my own cupboards were stocked, it was much easier to decline an invitation.

And there have been realizations as I've grown. There was a reason my grandma rarely made anything other than hot dogs and cereal. She used her fixed income to quietly help my parents buy groceries; to pay for our ballet classes and piano lessons; to ensure we never knew that we didn't have as much as the other kids we played with. She quieted her hunger with silver spoons and lots of sugar — the hunger for her grandchildren to have more was greater than the nagging in her stomach.

Today Jesus shows up and asks for some food. And when they hand him a piece of broiled fish, it says he ate it right then and there.

There are theological reasons as to why these details

are included here. Our author is ensuring we know that this is really Jesus, really in the flesh, really resurrected fully in bodily form. Ghosts don't eat, but bodies do. And so Jesus eats in front of the disciples to prove it is fully him.

But I think it's equally true that resurrection makes you hungry.

In previous stories, Jesus invites himself over for dinner. He dines with those we don't expect. And in every case, there is a profound theological reason for his doing so. But in every case, I suspect his hunger also leads him to do so. You can't walk and teach and heal without working up an appetite. Our Savior, fully God, fully human, *needed to eat*.

And I know that when we're doing the work of this Savior, when we're engaged in the teaching and the healing, when we're finding resurrection, when we're following Jesus as closely as we can, we will get hungry too.

The hunger comes in many forms: the gnawing at your stomach that you might have experienced too; the inability to rest from your work to eat, because you know the thing you're doing is more important that feeding yourself in that moment; the exhaustion that comes from giving yourself so fully to a task that you're too distracted to realize you haven't had a meal.

And the hunger comes when you realize that all is not well in the world — when you hear the cries in the desert

and the orphanage; from the Syrian boy whose image has seared our eyes this week; from the fear of people who live in pain and poverty outside our Olympic games. This realization can stir and startle and start to growl so loudly that you know you cannot exist as you currently are; that you must do something about all that is not well.

And the hunger comes from inside — from the fervent need to overcome; the recognition that there is more to this world that you were handed, and the unquenchable desire to go, to reach, to do more than the world expects of you; a parent's ability to go hungry so children can eat; a generation's drive to break ceilings so the next can fly; a people's need to demolish barriers so their children can have what they did not; a nagging so deep from within that it will not be fed until all is overcome.

This is *holy hunger*. And I believe it originates from a God who hungers for the hearts of her children; who longed for them to return to her and sent prophet and priest to bring them home; who was unsatisfied as we continued to hurt one another and turn away, until God finally decided to enter into her children's world, becoming like us, becoming one of us, still hungry for our hearts and now hungry too for food, finding both over the table as he ate and talked and taught us.

The hunger compelled him to finally set his own table, feeding us himself. The hunger

compelled him all the way to the cross, all the way to the grave. Only then did grace become enough to satisfy. Only then, when all were reconciled through resurrection, only then did the hunger subside.

And something happened there ... something happened as Christ ascended and Spirit descended ... something happened that transferred that hunger now to those who walk in his way. Those who fed Jesus that fish went out and began fishing for *people*. They became as hungry as their teacher and did not rest in showing all the love of God, teaching and healing and proclaiming resurrection.

Those of us who claim Christ as Savior follow in this way: hungry for justice and for mercy; hungry for the bread of life; thirsty for the living water. This hunger will lead us to places we wouldn't otherwise be. And this hunger will lead us to meet people and do things we didn't want or expect to do.

And here's the thing: It's really easy, in this world, in this place, at this time, to not be very hungry. We are a people who rely more on our clocks to tell us it's mealtime than our stomachs.

And I know it is easier to *not* respond to the invite when the cupboards are stocked. I know it is easier to decline the call when our own table awaits us at home. I know I would not choose today to eat tortillas out of the back of a truck or go on a peanut butter fast for a week. I know I would not have

been hungry enough to be in those guest seats without days of holding ailing children and walks in the desert.

And I know I would not have encountered Jesus Christ at the table had I not been a guest in those uncomfortable places.

Friends, we are fond of saying here that this world is beautiful, and it is broken. Our call is to work all the days of our lives in following Jesus' lead to make the beauty outweigh the brokenness, until the day Christ comes again. And when done fully, that work will make us hungry.

So in this last day of table stories, I pray that we get hungry. I pray that you consider what makes your soul start to growl, what makes you want to work without ceasing, and that you do those things — that you work towards God's end to the point others take notice and invite you in for dinner.

And when you're invited, I hope that you go — and that you experience the sacred things that happen when you get hungry enough for the holy to break in.

And I pray that as this gathered community, we can keep being hungry together — hungry for the mac and cheese on our back tables, but also hungry to grow and to change and to continue to do God's work in new ways in this place. Our world is starving for the Holy Spirit, so let's meet its hunger with our own and witness what happens when we all come hungry with Christ to the table.

Let's pray: Holy God, make us hungry for the things you desire for us and your world. Equip us and sustain us to do all that you call us to. For this you came. For this you showed us the way. Help us to walk in it, all the way to the guest seats. Amen.



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