

Luke 24:36b-48
Third Sunday of Easter

Breaking Bread*

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Episcopal Church of Our Savior, New York City
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Good morning. It's a blessing to be back at Our Savior and to worship with you today while Fr. Noel is away.

Whenever I think about happy memories my childhood – growing up in a first-generation immigrant Chinese American household in the San Francisco Bay Area – I often think of food.

Specifically, I think of family meals at home with my grandparents, my parents, and my brother. And I think of special celebrations – at the homes of family friends or in restaurants – with our many “aunties” and “uncles.”

I also remember helping out my mom whenever we would have guests over. She would spend the entire day in the kitchen cooking delicious dishes – a cold appetizer plate with jellyfish, winter melon soup, scrambled eggs with dried scallops, and steamed fish.

I loved watching my mom preside over the stove and helping her out. My brother and I were the servers: we would scoop out the rice from the steamer, and bring the dishes to the dining room for our guests. And we would collect the plates after each course and bring them back to the kitchen.

To this day, whenever I feel like celebrating a happy event – or whenever I miss my family – I will come to Chinatown and order some Chinese food. It is, indeed, comfort food for me.

In today's Gospel reading from Luke, Jesus appears to his disciples and their companions after his resurrection. And what does he do? He eats with them. They give him a piece of broiled fish, and he “took it and ate in their presence.”

On one level, the point of the story is to show the disciples – and us – that the risen Christ is not a ghost. At first, the disciples were startled and terrified. But Jesus calms them down by showing them his hands and feet and by eating fish. After all, ghosts don't have flesh and bones. Nor do they eat food.

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But the more significant point about Jesus eating in their presence is that he makes himself known to them – as today’s collect so beautifully reminds us – in the “breaking of the bread.” That is, Jesus’ disciples encounter the risen Christ in the context of a shared meal.

Whenever we worship together here at Our Savior on Sundays, we also encounter Jesus in the breaking of the bread and in our shared meal around the table. Jesus’ real presence is among us in the Holy Eucharist. Take. Eat. This is my Body. This is my Blood. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Like the encounter between Jesus and his disciples described in today’s gospel reading, our weekly Eucharists consist of two separate but closely related parts. First, we have the Liturgy of the Word (that is, the teachings about scripture). Second, we have the Liturgy of the Table (that is, the shared meal).

We hear in today’s gospel reading that Jesus opens the minds of the disciples about the prophecies in the Hebrew Bible. He reminds them that the Messiah will rise from the dead on the third day and that this has been fulfilled with his own resurrection. This was their Liturgy of the Word.

And we also hear how Jesus takes broiled fish from his disciples and eats it in their midst. This was their Liturgy of the Table.

But our encounter with Jesus is not limited to what we do upstairs on Sunday mornings at 11:00. Our encounter with the risen Christ continues *after* the service, whenever we gather for our community meal and fellowship downstairs.

Most Episcopal churches have coffee hour after worship. I’ve always been impressed by the fact that Our Savior has a full community meal, which is often followed by Christian education. To me, this meal and teaching is a rich continuation of the Liturgy of the Table and the Liturgy of the Word.

What we do upstairs is reflected in what we do downstairs. During our time together downstairs, we also encounter the risen Christ. Jesus is in the midst of us when we eat together, when we study the Word, and when we share with each other what has happened in our lives during the past week.

Where else have you seen Jesus in the breaking of the bread? Where else have you seen Jesus outside of this service? Have you seen him in the faces of those who are hungry and without food? Have you seen him in the faces of the elderly, the sick, or the homeless? Have you seen him in the faces of strangers who might at first seem like fearsome ghosts?

During this Easter season, I invite you to see the risen Christ not just on Sundays in church, but everywhere around you. I invite you to encounter the risen Christ especially in the breaking of bread. Yes, Jesus is present in your meals and encounters

with family, friends, and loved ones. But he is also present in your meals and encounters with strangers and unexpected guests.

May your minds and eyes be opened by the risen Christ, just as the minds and eyes of the disciples and their companions were opened in their encounter with Jesus.

Amen.