

Fed by Grace | Food in the Gospels

He Took and Ate

Luke 24.36ff

4.20.14 Easter

While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. ³⁸ And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. ⁴¹ While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; ⁴³ and He took it and ate it before them. ⁴⁴ Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ "You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." ⁵⁰ And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple praising God.

Last year, after Christmas, between Christmas and Easter we began a series on the life and work of Jesus Christ. I started off with the idea of looking at the people Jesus Christ encountered in His three-year ministry. And then I began to see how often those encounters took place over meals. He eats and drinks with people. That was His method.

Then I also began to see that at these meals, dinner parties, weddings, celebrations – Jesus Christ often made reference to foods and eating and wine and bread and thirst and hosting and inviting – He uses these as symbols for spiritual things and occasions for spiritual teaching. God made us to eat and drink and to do it TOGETHER and eating is important to “the perfecting of our nature” as communal beings made in the image of God (Leon Cass, The Hungry Soul).

So, we picked up this year and continued to find plenty of references...and today, we land the bird. The series is over (though you'll find lots more that we didn't cover) and we turn to the very end, closing sentences of Luke's Gospel and sure enough another mention of food...of Jesus Christ eating, broiled fish with a group of His disciples AFTER He has died!

What does it mean? Is there some special significance to this meal? Does it have any importance to our present lives on this Easter Sunday, 2014?

Let's look at this unusual passage and see, #1 The Attitude of the Students (and why that's important) #2 The Approach of the Risen Man (and why that's important) #3 The Rest of the Story (and why that's important).

This chapter is written with amazing artistry and deliberateness. The historian was a doctor, Luke the Beloved Physician, (Col 4.14) and at the start he promised that he carefully researched his work and consulted the eyewitnesses. And this concluding chapter (which, we'll see is NOT the conclusion) records a number of facts and details that DON'T seem to fit.

It begins with these women who were utterly shattered to see Jesus Christ die in this unimaginable and horrible way called crucifixion. But, trying to keep it together, the women see this mutilated body wrung out of blood and vitality and become depleted and dead. The body is taken down from the cross/the gallows and hastily wrapped in a linen sheet and put into kind of cave cut into a cliff or a natural rock wall. It's the Jewish Sabbath so they can't do the normal work of embalming the body.

And they return on the next day, the third day, to do the embalming. They wonder how they will get in since the stone that covers the door to the cave is extremely heavy and they will need a number of men to roll it uphill so they can access the tomb.

But then they claim that when they arrived the massive stone was rolled away and the disfigured, mangled body was gone. And these women claim to have seen these dazzling beings, perhaps angels, who said to the women, ““Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” (Luke 24.5-7)

So the women came to His students and these men listened and concluded that their story was, “nonsense” and would not believe them (v. 11).

Peter, however, went to check out their story and sure enough there was no body and Peter was marveling.

Then there’s a long story in the middle of this carefully composed chapter about two students of Jesus Christ, Clopas and someone else and they are sort of running away from the “danger-zone” – fleeing Jerusalem heading to a town about seven miles away. They’re joined on their walk by a Stranger (maybe He was wearing a hoodie or something over His head and face) and the Stranger is oblivious to what has taken place in Jerusalem with this famous Rabbi who was tried, found guilty and hanged to death on a cross, a man named Jesus of Nazareth.

So the two fleeing disciples, amazed at how ignorant this Stranger is begin telling Him the story. They thought this Rabbi was a prophet, WAS EVEN THE MESSIAH but they must’ve been wrong ‘cause He’s dead...though, these women said He was risen (“But, you know women!”)

And then the stranger begins to sort of rebuke them (“Maybe He knows more than we thought!”) and to explain parts of the Hebrew Bible that point to these very happenings. And it turns out that the words of Moses and the Prophets and everywhere you look in the Hebrew Scriptures points to this and they’d never seen it this way before – BUT IT WAS THERE ALL ALONG!...

And now they reach their stop (mile marker 7) they ask the Stranger to stay with them and He does and they ask Him to break the bread and pray and suddenly they see, “It’s HIM...” and He’s gone. Something in the way He broke the bread.

Then these two scaredy-cat students go back to Jerusalem and tell the other disciples,

“OUR HEARTS were on fire as He explained all the Scriptures to us– and when He broke that bread we saw it: HE IS ALIVE!”

And as they relate these things to the whole community of “unbelieving believers” then Jesus Christ comes into the room and they say, “LORD! We’ve been expecting YOU! We knew you were going to rise from the dead just like You promised!”

That’s not how it happened at all! Look at the words Luke stacks up. Their attitude is fear, confusion, troubled, startled, frightened, doubt, and abject disappointment. And my question IS: why is it important for the historian to capture this mood and to use all these descriptors?

And the answer, at least in part, is that Luke wants us to see that this was NOT some sort of wish fulfillment or group hypnosis or some sort of pseudo-spiritual ecstasy. They didn’t think this was going to happen.

The record leaves them looking like a bunch of doubters and deserters and as N.T Wright has said, “There has been no attempt to tidy up the details”. We might ask, “If the resurrection was a hoax then WHAT were the writers trying to gain from it?” They make themselves look bad! They are not portrayed as heroes but as zeroes!

The testimony of women was inadmissible in the law courts of the ancient Mediterranean world and yet THIS is the very testimony they give priority. And the simplest explanation for it is that IT JUST HAPPENED THIS WAY.

The disciples were once convinced that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and then they saw Him crucified and they knew THIS WAS NOT THE MESSIAH... this Man could not save Himself never-mind the world.

And that’s why when the Risen Man APPROACHES them, the first words out of His mouth are, “Peace be to YOU”. These are loaded words! They are saying, “I know you are doubters and deserters – I forgive you. I still love you. This is why I died for you – not because you are strong and spiritually powerful heroes but because you're weak and sinful and doubting. Peace.”

But also the Hebrew word, “Shalom” is a catch-word meaning salvation. And Jesus is saying, “When you saw Me die, you gave up on Me and on the possibility that I could

save you... YOU ABANDONED THE HOPE THAT I COULD BRING SHALOM – because a dead man can't bring salvation but I'm here to say, "Shalom! Peace! I AM NOT DEAD – I AM POWERFUL TO SAVE!"

Then He points them to the Scriptures as He did to the men on the road. "Look! All these examples in the history of the Israelites, examples of salvation coming on the THIRD DAY – and now the ultimate example. They were preparing you for THIS – for Me! You failed to see it, failed to see the whole focus of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms but this was the plan from the beginning. I AM THE ONE COME TO SAVE THE WORLD – search the Scriptures and you'll find Me on every page! AND HE OPENED THEIR MINDS TO SEE THE TRUE INTENT AND FOCUS OF ALL THE SCRIPTURES!

AND last – He approaches them with shalom, with Scripture and with ...SUBSTANCE! "See My hands! I'm not a ghost. These are the hands of a construction worker a carpenter/stone mason..."

Verse 40 : "And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet." They had to be convinced and HE SUBSTANTIATED their faith. They would be witnesses of this to the world and He wanted them to be crystal clear...see Me, touch Me. I am not a ghost, a spirit, a vision, a hallucination, an ecstatic experience – I WAS STONE COLD DEAD AND I AM RISEN AND THE FIRST HUMAN BEING IN THE NEW CREATION."

And then... "just so there is no doubt...because the whole world is DEPENDING on your clear witness: DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO EAT?"

And they gave Him a piece of broiled fish. (And everyone leans in...everyone holds their breath...EVERYTHING hangs on this one bite.

Have you ever seen parents feed a baby who's just started on solid food? You know how the parent sort of moves her own mouth in anticipation of the baby's mouth? THAT' HOW I PICTURE THE DISCIPLES AT THIS POINT...

"...and He TOOK it and ATE it in front of them." They probably cheered!

And then the passage ends. The book of Luke ENDS. But not really...it's an UN-FINISHED finish! The end begs a second volume – the rest of the STORY.

And LUKE, as you may know, wrote the sequel, The Acts of the Apostles... "I am sending

you forth to the Nations, the Gentiles – tell them that repentance and forgiveness is available to anyone because I have fulfilled YOUR obligations – I have lived the obedient life and have died to satisfy divine justice. Anyone who receives YOUR message will be like ME, will NOT be swallowed by death WILL BE IN MY NEW CREATION – the rest of the Story!”

And the book ends with the disciples gone from great terror to great joy...praising God in the Jerusalem Temple... and themselves members of a New and indestructible Temple made up of living stones – people from every nation tribe and tongue (Rev. 14.6)

If you already believe – you are part of that international family and you have GOOD reason to believe... If you have NOT yet come to believe, you TOO have GOOD REASON TO BELIEVE. This is good and carefully written history. It can stand up under scrutiny. It's SUBSTANTIAL and it says, “Good News! God has intervened! A UNIQUE event has taken place. Shalom is achieved. Shalom is offered. Repent. Believe in Jesus Christ and be a part of the REST OF THE STORY... the story that has no end!”

Let's pray!