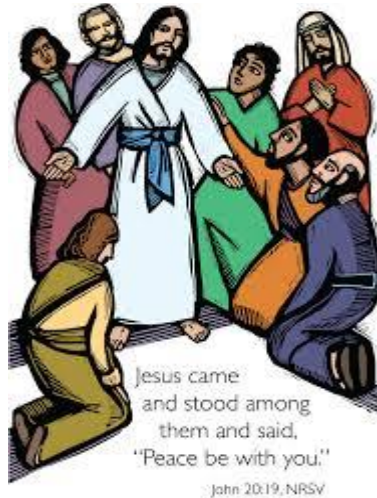


Sunday Morning Worship
Readings and Prayers 14th April



Zephaniah 3:14-20

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!

The Lord has taken away the judgements against you,
he has turned away your enemies.

The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.

The Lord, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing
as on a day of festival.

I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for it.

I will deal with all your oppressors
at that time.

And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.
At that time I will bring you home,
at the time when I gather you;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the Lord.

This is the word of the Lord.

Acts 3.12-19

When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, 'You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

'And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,

This is the word of the Lord.

Luke 24:36-48

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Reflection by Lindsey Coulthard

I wonder what your favourite comfort food is. When it's cold and wet and windy what is the dish that you long to sit down to most? When you've been away from home for some time or even away on holiday I wonder what dish it is that says, 'now you're home'. In our house when Henry used to return from university for the holidays it was usually a good hearty bowl of chicken broth packed with pearl barley and fluffy dumplings. And even though he made it for himself and his flatmates when he was away, he always said it never tasted quite the same as when he had it at home. And always, always whenever he did come home – the first place he headed for was the the fridge with the question 'What's to eat?'

So why I am talking about food? Because today we hear another of Luke's post resurrection accounts which involves food. This one follows on immediately after the road to Emmaus account where the two unnamed disciples invite Jesus to stay with them and only when he blesses and breaks the bread do they realise that it's him: 'Then were their eyes opened, and they recognised him.' In John's gospel Jesus cooks breakfast on the beach for his disciples after his resurrection, sharing bread and fish with them but none of them dare ask who he is 'because they *knew* (know) it was the Lord.' Today when Jesus appears to his disciples he asks them, 'Have you anything (here) to eat?' And we're told he's given a piece of broiled fish which he promptly eats 'in their presence.'

Three post resurrection accounts of Jesus each one involving food, all three contain bread; two include fish. Luke tells us several stories of Jesus eating meals with people. He eats with sinners and prominent leaders. He eats in private homes and in the open country. In one chapter, he feeds 5,000 and in the next he is eating with Mary and Martha. In fact most, if not all, of the meals Jesus ate were intimate situations; even when the 5,000 are fed, he asks his disciples to sit the crowd in smaller groups so that each person is part of a more intimate circle. In a recent article in the Church Times on hospitality the Revd. Benjamin Bell suggests that hospitality is something we ought to think about theologically and he points out that 'Throughout Luke, Jesus is either coming from, going to, or actually at dinner'.

So what is going on in our gospel story today? Well, the Church Fathers got themselves into a bit of a pickle debating whether or not Jesus really did eat after the resurrection. They argued that the risen Jesus had no need of food, but used the act of eating only as a means for the manifestation of the truth – that he had indeed been raised from the dead. The fact that the resurrected Jesus could eat was proof to his disciples that he had a true body and was not therefore a ghost, as the disciples had initially thought. Jesus reassures them of this: 'Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have'. More recent commentators also draw attention to the belief in the ancient world that ghosts did not have feet; hence Jesus makes a point of showing them his hands *and* his feet.

But Jesus' request for something to eat is more than just a physical demonstration of his 'realness' here though, so I offer a few thoughts. Firstly, I think Jesus is reminding his disciples to offer hospitality, just as he had done a few days previously in the upper room. When a stranger visits, when a guest comes among you, invite them in. I see wonderful examples of this all the time here at St. Stephen's. One of the things that has moved me most here has been to witness the hospitality shown to those who come to Open Church – whether they're occasional or regular attenders the welcome is always so warm. But more than that; for some, the invitation to table has been transformational – beginning at one table with tea and cake and moving to this (*altar*) table to receive bread and wine. We also offer hospitality to Jesus on a personal level when we pray or when we approach this table as we'll all be doing later this morning.

Secondly, Jesus is clearly reminding the disciples of his humanity. Luke was Greek and was writing for a Greek audience for whom the popular religions were the mystery cults where gods and goddesses were worshipped from a distance. Jesus brought a completely different understanding of God as one who was not, who is not, who will never be far away or distant but Emmanuel – God with us.

And thirdly, Jesus is embracing his disciples, drawing them into community with him. It's what happens when we join together in worship, it's what happens when we gather at this table, the risen Lord comes among us: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.' We sometimes hear those words before we share

The Peace and we hear that reassurance in our first reading today too albeit in a different context but we hear twice, 'The Lord, your God, is in your midst.' Zephaniah asserts that this God is moved. This God is deeply affected by human attitudes and actions. This God does not watch from a distance, but enters into the life of the world.

So in our gospel passage we get a tantalising glimpse of what a resurrection body might be like but I think, more importantly, is that this appearance leads to a commission for the disciples: there is a job to be done. Scripture has been fulfilled and the good news needs sharing with all nations – beginning in Jerusalem. '(You *(they)* are witnesses of these things.' We see this mission being carried out as Peter speaks to the people in today's second reading. He explains the real meaning of what Jesus did, and how they are to respond to his message. Obviously, this mission and mandate is for each one of us too. We also, through our baptism and incorporation into the Church as the body of Christ, have received the same mission.

Now of course, each of us will have our own relationship with food and each of us is gifted with the capacity for hospitality. But the fact is you don't need to be a Michelin starred chef to offer it and it doesn't need to be anything fancy. (Mary and Martha did not put on an extravagant feast for Jesus.) A cup of tea is quite sufficient, though I'd never refuse a bowl of chicken broth – simply because it says 'you're home'. But hospitality is not about the food, it's about the fellowship. And however it's offered, it's always an opportunity for encounter – we may not even be aware that spiritual encounter is taking place but we host the space for it happen. When Jesus asks, 'Have you anything (here) to eat?' he isn't concerned about meeting a physical need. He's concerned about the spiritual need for fellowship and communion with one another.

'Have you anything (here) to eat?

'Have we anything here to eat?'

Yes we have. And whenever we offer *that* table (for refreshments) or *this* table (for Communion) to others, we are witnesses to the love God shared with us in Jesus. 'We're home' and our mission is to invite others to share in the warmth and the grace of that space.

Amen.

Prayers

Risen Lord Jesus,
you reveal to us the love and radiance of the Father;
you bring us the peace that passes all understanding and so we pray to
you now.

To the bidding: Lord in your mercy
Please respond: hear our prayer

Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Father, we give you thanks for the gift of eternal life.
May we know in our lives
that the crucified one is alive and comes to us:
turn our doubts and disbelief into awe and wonder,
until we rejoice in the glory and presence of the risen Lord.
We pray for churches that are struggling at this time,
for those who have lost vision and grown cold in their love;
for Christians who have lost faith or entered into deep doubt.
We pray that the church may witness to your resurrection.
Silence

Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for all who seek to relieve hunger and suffering:
for those who seek to help people rise out of their troubles.
We remember the United Nations and the World Health Organisation.
We pray for peace keeping forces, relief agencies and charities
and all who work for the well-being of others.
We remember especially any whose lives are in danger.
Silence

Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We give you thanks for those who have shared their food
and their faith with us,
for all who have sustained and nourished our minds and our bodies,
for those who have cared for the needs of our spirits.
We pray for those who have been deprived of love,
and we pray for our own homes and neighbourhoods.
Silence

Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for all who hunger for food, for shelter,
for love, or for spiritual refreshment;
we pray for those who feel rejected or lonely:
for the sick or the troubled
and especially those who have no one to care for them.
From our own community we pray for:
Joyce Pringle, Peter Murphy, Anuwat Wanggane, Alan Coe,
Sam and Andy Fellows, Jack Tubby, Rob & Lucy,
Roger Jones, Patricia Ash, Jason Thomson, Ryan Day, Bryan Plester,
Brenda Hulland, David New, and Adrina and Alan Price.
And in a moment now we lift before you
those on our own hearts this morning.
Silence

Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We remember the recently departed: Revd. Michael Dunn
and we pray for all who mourn.
We remember with love and gratitude
those whose anniversary of death falls at this time: Barbara Ervine, Jim
and John Hellicar, David Phillips, Tom Roberts and Mike Niccolls, Irene
Everett-Perkins, Eric Orton and Winifred Duckworth.

And we remember those we love but see no longer.

We long for the day when we shall all see Christ as he is in his glory.
And we pray that we may triumph over darkness and death
and share with the faithful in the light of your Kingdom

Merciful Father,

**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**