

"Eating with Ghosts"

April 15, 2018

Scripture: Luke 24: 36b-48

³⁶ Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ 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." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ 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." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ 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, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.



Today we continue the resurrected Jesus' walk with the disciples. In the first week of the series, He met Mary in the garden and announced that He was alive. As we looked at Jesus' ministry, we see that it was very important for Jesus to make all people

feel accepted just as they were so that they felt like they belonged. In calling Mary by name, Jesus let her know that she still belonged to Him. Last week Jesus visited the disciples and began to help them see the new way forward. Thomas at first doubts and then comes to believe only after Jesus invites Him to see and touch and feel, something we often must do first before we ever come to believe. Through Thomas being welcomed back into community, back into belonging, Jesus formed honest faith where there was once doubt.

Today, we continue with the disciples. In spite of seeing the risen Christ a few times and just now hearing the report of the two Emmaus travelers, they still remain huddled together in someone's safe place, trying to make sense of their world and where to go from here. Yes, Jesus is risen, but what does that mean for the disciples who are left behind? Today, Jesus meets once again with His followers and begins to give them purpose and direction. Let us pray...

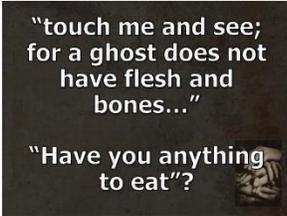
In our passage today, as the disciples are gathered in a secure location, they are trying to hatch a plan for what to do next. Into this planning meeting Jesus suddenly appears. Jesus' first words reveal what must have been the disciples' state of mind and reaction to His sudden appearance, as He says, "*Peace be with you*". For their part, the disciples were "*startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost*". Reading the situation quickly, Jesus invites them to come close. Jesus knows that His time left is limited, so He invites them into an intimate and personal space. To calm them, Jesus offers His hands and His feet

"Peace be with you".

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as proof as to who is here now in their presence. He says to them, "*touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have*". The disciples draw close and are able to touch and feel Jesus, to see that He is no phantom. Even then, Luke records these words: "*While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering*". They have heard the stories of Mary and of the two followers who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus and they have seen Jesus twice themselves. And even then, there was disbelief and wondering. Jesus must have sensed their fear and doubt. So, Jesus asks them, "*Do you have anything to eat*"? Surely a ghost would not eat food. He takes and eats a piece of broiled fish in their presence.



"touch me and see;
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"Have you anything
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Culturally speaking, this would have been quite forward of Jesus. It would be like you or I showing up uninvited to a neighbor's house midafternoon today and plunking down on their couch and asking what they had to eat. In Jesus' day, having someone into your home to share a meal signified deep intimacy and friendship and unity with the guest. Invitation was always extended and graciously accepted. Jesus knows all this protocol yet places higher value on showing up so that He could cut through their fear and doubt. He needs to this so that He can prepare them for what lies ahead – the spreading of the good news and the development of the new church.



Eating with Ghosts

To review events to this point, Jesus has been tried, beaten, crucified, buried, and has won eternal victory over sin and death. In our passage today, Jesus enters the room to find his closest partners in ministry, those who He has taught and trained up over the last three years, freaking out and filled with disbelief.

But this does not seem to concern Jesus. Just like with all the lepers and outcasts, the prostitutes and tax collectors, the sinners and broken people, Jesus simply takes them as they are and welcomes them into His presence. Jesus knows the potential in these men and women gathered with Him in this room, this group that represents the future of the church. He invites them to touch Him, to share a meal with Him. It is only when they know that they belong, that this is really Jesus, that He is really with them, that He can begin to open their minds to understand the scriptures. Again, we see the pattern: first we belong and then we will begin to talk about how to behave and to figure out what to believe. Jesus can only teach from the scriptures after all the fear and doubt and questioning has been answered and after the disciples feel again like they belong to this risen Jesus too.



Belong
Behave
Believe

Spending time together, sharing in a meal, helping those in need, and building a sense of community and belonging have always been at the core of Jesus' ministry. Once someone felt like they were loved and that they belonged, then Jesus would go on to teach and minister to them. This is the pattern of

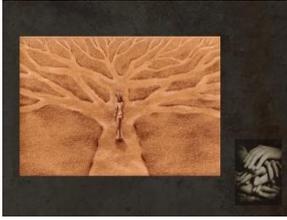
discipleship that works best for us today as well. When we gather together – whether for a common meal or to study the Bible or to do a project or to worship – it is there that we can form relationships. It is within these relationships that we can help each other to grow closer to God and to grow deeper in our faith. We were built to be in community and to live life together. For Jesus, relationship is really matters. So, establishing that sense of belonging was always the first step. It usually needs to be our first step too.

In verse 47, Jesus instructs the disciples *"that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem"*. This is the task that

"...that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem".
- Luke 24:47



Jesus assigns His followers. As followers of Jesus, our task is also to do as Jesus instructs in this verse. We too are called to proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. But we cannot just walk up to someone, blurt out this proclamation, and expect them to suddenly have faith in Jesus as their Savior. It simply does not work that way. In order to help His own disciples understand this command and how it is played out in reality, Jesus first shared a meal with them. This is a great place to start today as well. When we extend invitation to one another, when we draw close together, and when we share food and fellowship, then we build a sense of belonging. When we lean in close enough to touch and see and be fed and filled together, practicing an essential of Christian behavior, we grown together in community. While this is true for folks who feel comfortable engaging others and being a deeper part of the faith community, for others this is outside of their comfort zone.



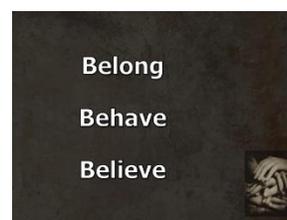
To illustrate that we are all on our own faith journeys and therefore at different places along that road, by a show of hands, how many would feel comfortable joining a new Bible study starting later this week on the book of James? Perhaps another question. Who would be willing to help with the preparation and serving of the community meal on the 29th of this month? Maybe a third question. How many of you would feel comfortable having a few people over to your house once a week for a meal and a time of prayer? You see, just because someone is in the pew on a Sunday morning, it does not mean they are ready to jump in and become a part of anything and everything. The reality then is that even for those who feel that they belong here and feel like they have a pretty solid faith, the acts of proclaiming repentance and the forgiveness of sins is many steps away. And if I am being honest too, there are 'church' things that I am sometimes reluctant to do or even will avoid if I can. Proclaiming repentance and the forgiveness of sins to a stranger would be one of those things for me. The point is, we all have a point at which we become uncomfortable. To push someone to do something beyond their comfort zone or to coerce participation is something that Jesus would have never done. It would have violated the sense of belonging and community that He worked so hard to build and maintain.



This place of discomfort is where Jesus found many of the disciples that day as He met them in that room. Yes, they believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior and, yes, they were overjoyed to be in His presence again. But were they ready then and there to go out and proclaim the repentance and forgiveness of sins? Well, probably not.

Jesus knew that they had doubts and fears and that they were hurting and unsure of the way forward. Therefore, Jesus took the time to rebuild community, to assure them of His presence, and then He went to work preparing them to go out to build the church. It was at this point of comfort and belonging that Jesus "*opened their minds to understand the scriptures*". He connected all the dots for them and helped them to see their new role in the building of the kingdom here on earth.

Jesus met His disciples where they were at and went from there. This was Jesus' common practice throughout the gospels. He met all people right where they were at, made them feel like they were welcomed and belonged, and then He ministered to them. This is the practice of ministry that we are called to follow as well. This day, this very day, there are many people who are not ready for belief or even to behave as we would hope they would. Jesus met lots of people like this. Whether it was a demon-possessed man or a prostitute caught in adultery or a hated tax collector sitting in a tree or whomever, Jesus took on all comers. He calls us to do the same. Yes, we will struggle at times with a person's lack of faith or with the behaviors they choose to practice. When we do so, we must remember the way that Jesus ministered: belong, behave, believe.



In Matthew 25, we find a list of those we are called to. They are the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner. We are called to go to those in need, to meet their needs, to help them feel loved. This is where the

sense of belonging begins. It begins when we care enough to take the time to show them that they matter to us and that they are loved by us. When we are willing to give of ourselves, of our time, and of our resources, then relationship begins. Having a relationship is where the sense of acceptance and belonging starts. Then, at some point and if we are willing, maybe we are blessed to move on to behave and believe. These will come if we are willing to invest in the relationship. The old saying, "They don't care how much you know until they know you care", is true when it comes to sharing our faith too.

There is another group out there as well. They are the outcasts, the sinners, the broken, the lost. For some, the loneliness or the sadness is obvious. And for some, the power of sin in their life is evident. But for others, you would never know it looking at them. On the surface, life seems good. But for some people there are skeletons in the past, there is no happiness in the present, and they have no hope for the future. For others, inside there is some demon that they wrestle with every day. Maybe it is anger. Maybe it is an addiction. Maybe it is depression. Maybe it is an illness. All of these need Jesus and the life He offers. For all of these folks, the path to a relationship with Jesus begins in the same place. It begins with you or I investing ourselves, our time, and our resources to get to know them, to become friends, to help them feel like they belong. Only then will we earn the privilege of introducing them to our friend Jesus.

All of the experiences that we have each had with Jesus have shaped and formed us into the people we are today. Some here today are mature and strong in their faith. They are far along the journey. Some here are just beginning to understand what a personal relationship with Jesus might look like. And most of us are somewhere in between. What we hold in common is that we belong to Christ and that we all belong to each other. Within these two relationships we all are invited to become a more engaged part of this community of faith and to deepen our sense of belonging with Christ and with each other. It is from this place that we experience the love and grace and mercy and forgiveness that is at the core of our Christian faith. Once we have been touched by His love and grace and mercy and forgiveness and once have tasted community and know that we belong, then we can begin to be witnesses to this faith that we profess.

We are all on a journey of faith. Some we know have yet to begin their journey. Maybe that is someone here today. Wherever we find ourselves does not matter. What matters is that Jesus is calling us all deeper into relationship, deeper into our connection to Him, deeper into love with Him. As we live this thing called faith out in our lives, we do witness to our faith. It is through helping others feel that they belong that we bear witness to Jesus' love. This week, may we seek to live our faith out loud so that all may come to know Jesus as the Lord and Savior of their life. May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) What could you do this week or even in the months ahead to grow in your faith and in your relationship with Jesus? How is this going to happen?
- 2) If we seek guidance, the Holy Spirit will lead us to someone in need of our love and care. Spend some time in prayer seeking God's will for you.
- 3) Faith is all about growth. Where could you give of your time and resources to either grow your faith or help someone else grow in their faith?