

# *Resurrection Feasts*

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Readings: Acts 10:34-43 Isaiah 25:6-9

## I.

There is something about celebrating resurrection that just begs for a good dinner. This year on Front Street that includes my sister Tineke and her son Jamie! Whatever the menu, you and I share this intuitive sense that Easter is a good day for a feast. There is something about celebrating resurrection that provokes a good dinner together, maybe some candlelight, the best dishes. My sister Tineke and I started feasting last night. We started Easter early, just about sunset, with a good curry dinner reminiscent of childhood together: rice and all the fixings. But the best part was the conversation: memory, hope and love.

In church today we also gather for a meal, sisters and brothers sharing together communion at Christ's table that represents the ancient hope that someday, to quote the prophet Isaiah, "*The LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And God will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; God will swallow up death forever. Then the Sovereign GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of God's people God will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.*"

We are having a resurrection feast today! Simple bits of bread, a cup shared: communion. If you are visiting today and wondering if it is ok to take communion, the answer is not very complicated. Yes. Yes, you are welcome, for we believe this meal is not ours to keep anyone away from, but a tiny foretaste of the great sacred banquet promised all of humankind—the feast for which Christ lived and died and was raised up.

## II.

What's the best meal you ever had? Do you remember the taste of the wine or the scent of the bread fresh baked? Or was it the conversation you had, the faces you hadn't seen in forever, laughter that healed, a welcome that surprised you?

Long ago, the early church also feasted in remembrance. The apostle Peter remembered having meals with Jesus of Nazareth -- including surprising ones—after Christ had been raised from the dead. Those who ate and drank with Jesus sensed that they were chosen for lovely work: sharing a liberating message with all of humanity. Something in the taste of those meals with the risen Christ gave them hope, allowed them to get going, enabled them to find courage after terrifying days in Jerusalem.

You and I live in troubled times. It is natural to wonder how it is possible that God will create a feast for all the peoples, when the whole world seems engaged in conflict, and the suffering of neighbors near and far is great.

The earliest followers of Jesus struggled with these questions. They had to figure out what to do with the message after the messenger they loved had been

killed. But facing an empty tomb, and meeting Christ at the table, they came together to the conviction that Christ had been raised from the dead. The apostle Peter, whose little sermon we read this morning, understood down deep that God's sense of possibility is not limited by our sense of possibility. Resurrection is real. Resurrection says that when we thought hope was gone, when we thought life was over-- God does something new!

For starters, Peter understood that liberation, forgiveness and healing are God's agenda for the whole of humankind not just a chosen few: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who respects God and does what is right is acceptable to God. You know the message God sent ... preaching peace by Jesus Christ-- he is Lord of *all*." Simon Peter didn't say "Everybody except the Muslims, or everybody except the gay people, or everybody except the poor." Just ALL.

Peter spoke then of the life of Jesus, how God "anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power....We are witnesses," Peter said, "to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem." The preacher continued: "They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear... to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead."

There was something about eating and drinking with Jesus that caused those first Christians to recognize Christ: be it grilled fish on the lakeshore; fearful gatherings in an upper room; bread broken with a stranger met on the road, that caused their hearts to burn within them. There was something about simple meals:

feasts in the name of the resurrected one that restored their life too, had the power to send them in a whole new direction.

### III.

I want to share with you a story of one meal where the resurrected Jesus showed up, not with the early apostles, but with my grandmother. I wasn't able to be there, but I heard it from Grandma Naomi herself.

For most of her adult life my grandmother was a missionary in India, the wife of a doctor, herself a medical librarian, financial planner; and whatever was needed. A few years after my Grandpa Jack's death, Grandma Naomi, then in her eighties, was invited back to India. While there, she was invited to attend a dedication ceremony for a new village well. These deep wells have been the difference between sustenance and starvation for many small communities in Asia! And you help raise money for them through participating in each year's CROP walk, which supports Church World Service, the organization that digs the wells!

Getting that well was a big deal for the village, a life instead of death deal. And the people turned out in large numbers. But when she got to the party, my grandmother found that the local officials hosting the gathering, in their haste to be good to distinguished visitors like her, had unthinkingly created a problem. She found herself seated at a long table under a tent, being served tea and biscuits with a number of other dignitaries. A picturesque scene. And all around the tent, seated on the ground in the blazing south Indian sun, were the villagers. They had no tea, no cookies to eat. They got to watch the feast.

My grandmother Naomi was not tall in physical stature. She was short and slightly round. But she was not one to tolerate nonsense. “This cannot be,” she said to herself. She rose up from her seat. She grabbed as many of the biscuits—the cookies-- as she could, and broke them into little pieces on a platter. “I hated to do it”, she said, “but there wasn’t really enough otherwise.” And Naomi, aged eighty something, slowly walked. She walked alone to the closest villagers, and began to share the pieces, share what there was to be shared, under the hot sun. There were no words of institution, there was no hymn sung. Just one elderly woman breaking the unwritten rules on who is in who is out, who is important who is invisible, sharing the broken bits of tea biscuits with her sisters and brothers: because she could not bear to do otherwise. Communion.

#### IV.

*On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And God will destroy ... the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; God will swallow up death forever.*

Christ is risen! Death has been done in! The shroud over humanity can and will be torn away like the grave cloth binding the dead. Among us there is this resurrected and resurrecting Presence.

A few weeks ago, we sang together in church: *“We are one in the spirit, we are one in the Lord, and we pray that our unity will one day be restored: and they will know we are Christians by our love.”*

The love to which we are called is a grand thing, a challenging thing, a difficult and most lovely thing. It isn't just love for one another. The love to which you and I are called is a holy love we learn from Christ: love for ALL peoples, love for the least and the greatest, strangers and even enemies. And having met Jesus we are inspired and invited to share the love, however imperfectly however brokenly. You and I are invited to see what crackers and biscuits we have at hand. We are invited to take them up and step out of the little tent that has contained the party up till now. We are invited to break them up, and share them around, not as an exercise in patronage, not as a way of getting extra credit with God—but as living signs of our trust in the love more powerful than death, a force more powerful than fear or hate... a spirit of love set loose in the universe.

Come let us gather at the table of that Love. Let us gather to break bread and share a cup and pledge our lives once again, inviting everybody we can think of to the feast. Christ is risen. Alleluia! Christ is risen indeed.