God is vitally engaged with us

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Easter 3b – Luke 24.36-48

You have given my heart more gladness than they have when their corn, wine and oil increase. [Ps 4.7]

Vicky and I have some very old cook-books and we find it a delight to browse in them during holidays. How else are you going to find out how to roast larks the Dunstable way? Or, for that matter, with today's Gospel in mind, how are we going to *broil* fish? It sounds so worryingly like boiled. But, thanks to *Warne's Model Cookery* of 1879, we know it's more like 'barbequed', which sounds much tastier. Luke's Gospel is full of food and drink and I find it makes its stories very memorable. Some of the most memorable sermons I've heard were about food.

So as you might expect there's important food teaching for us to ponder in today's reading from Luke's Gospel. What we just heard happened late on the day of Jesus' resurrection. It's the day when two of his followers were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus and they were joined by a stranger they didn't recognise. The stranger walked with them; talked with them. But it wasn't until this stranger broke bread with them that evening that they realised it was Jesus. Then he vanished.

These two returned immediately to Jerusalem where they found 'the eleven' and all the others in a state of astonishment. The risen Jesus had just appeared to Peter! "The Lord has risen indeed," they said. The two travellers then told everyone about their experience of Jesus breaking bread with them on the road to Emmaus.

That's where we came into the story today. And now, while they're all talking, Jesus himself stands among them and says, "Peace be with you." He shows them the wounds of his crucifixion and offers to let them touch him. And then, despite his having recently eaten with the two travellers, he asks them if they've got something to eat. Food again. They give him some grilled fish – and some of the ancient manuscripts say they also gave him a piece of honeycomb. [Judg 14?] Just like at Emmaus where he broke bread, here he eats with his disciples again. And by doing this, they experience Jesus as truly physically resurrected.

This is the joy we give thanks for every time we share Holy Communion together: more than an intellectual or emotional experience, this physical sharing in the broken bread and wine poured out is our experience together of Jesus physically resurrected and alive in and through us today.

It's full of mystery, this food and the risen Jesus phenomenon in the Gospels. At first, his closest friends don't recognise him, but then their eyes are opened when he eats with them. He's the same person, yet somehow very different; he's physically there, but somehow differently. In John's gospel, we're told that the risen Jesus gets past locked doors. And in John, as we've seen in Luke, he eats with his friends. [Jn 21.9-10, 13] In both Gospels, at first, he's not recognised, then suddenly he is.

Central to the Gospel message is this claim that Jesus rose from the dead physically – not as a ghost who can't offer you wounds to touch, who can't eat or drink with you. Jesus rose from the dead physically as a living, breathing, eating, drinking person.

It's an enormously confronting claim; so confronting that people have tried to dilute it with theories about mass hypnosis and the gullibility of the simple Mediterranean

peasant mind. They forget that Jesus' early followers came from all walks of life, and had plenty of practical experience of the physical realities of life and death. All four gospels record that the disciples refused to believe it at first. So when Luke the physician records the conclusion of those gathered people that "the Lord has risen indeed," it's perfectly clear how momentous is the claim he is making.

The resurrection narrative reminds us that God always was, and still is, vitally engaged with us – the physical creation; vitally committed to our nurture and our restoration. That has serious implications for the way we treat each other and Earth. It's something we engage with together each year now in the Season of Creation.

I'm reminded of the famous charge from St Teresa of Avila …

Christ has no body now on earth but ours,

no hands but ours, no feet but ours,

ours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion is to look out to the earth,

ours are the feet by which Christ is to go about doing good

and ours are the hands by which Christ is to bless others now.

Anyway, given today's readings, perhaps a good start is to invite others to eat with us. It's an option that virus closed off for a while. But why not try now – what does that Psalm say – taste and see that the Lord is good. [34.8a] Let's give it a try. You never know who we might find at the table with us.

Amen