

“Have you anything here to eat?”  
Questions Jesus Asked  
September 2, 2018  
Pastor Marianne Cotter  
First UMC Baraboo, WI

“Have you anything here to eat?” That question came up when a foreign exchange student from France was living in Wisconsin. He was with his host family. This night there were sports and other activities after school. So eating dinner meant going to “the drive through.” Dinner was purchased from a server behind a glass window who handed the driver a bag. Then the family ate in the car! The French teenager found this incredible! Dinner in France was a leisurely – a time to enjoy good cooking. Meals took time to prepare, and to consume. Dinner was about more than food, it was also about conversation. Eating was never something you would do in your car, on the go. This sophisticated French teenager liked small town Wisconsin – all except this one custom of eating in your car!

“Have you anything here to eat?” In the church it has been our custom is to eat and drink in memory of Jesus. We do it the first Sunday of the month. Some churches do it weekly. Eating customs at church have varied over the centuries. Historically In the upper Midwest, church suppers have been common. Among UM churches, including this one, have housed or currently house a food pantry. Having a meal as part of a mid-week program is fairly common too. My spouse Jim served a United Methodist church near Green Bay once that had a very popular fund raiser. Five months of the year they had a church supper where the food was all dishes you’d find at a typical church potluck. People lined up outside thirty minutes ahead to go to those church suppers. Our food traditions here include a community Christmas dinner. For the past several years a mission outreach has been covering the cost of meals for parents/guardians of summer school students, who would otherwise go without if the meal wasn’t provided free of charge.

Church traditions around food go all the way back to Jesus. For Jesus, Eating and drinking were key to his ministry. The gospels begin with Jesus fasting in the wilderness for forty days. His life ends with extreme thirst on the cross. In John's gospel Jesus starts his ministry celebrating at a wedding at Cana and later calls himself "the bread of life". Jesus did a lot of his teaching over meals with Pharisees and he also ate with tax collectors and known sinners. When she heals Jairus' daughter he instructs them "give her something to eat." He uses the same words to tell the disciples to feed the crowds who came to hear him. The hour has gotten late: "you give them something to eat" Jesus tells the disciples.

Eating and drinking is a big part of the last chapter of Luke's gospel: chapter 24. It begins with Easter morning, with the women visiting the empty tomb. Then we have the story of the walk to Emmaus. Cleopas and his companion are going home, despondent after watching the terrible end to Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem. A stranger begins walking with them, who doesn't seem to know about all that has just happened so they give him the details. The stranger responds by telling them what Moses and the prophets said about how God's messiah must suffer and then enter into his glory. As they come near the village, the stranger goes ahead but they get to stay and eat with them. Verses 30-31 of chapter 24 say "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight." Excited, elated Cleopas and his companion return to Jerusalem. The scene is chaotic: "The Lord has risen indeed and appeared to Simon." Then Cleopas shares how the risen Christ had been made known to them in breaking of the bread.

That's where today's scripture picks up. It's now Easter evening. Amidst the chaos and excitement of the day, Jesus appears and says "Peace be with you." Terrified, they think this must be a ghost. But Jesus assures them he's not a ghost but is in fact

alive. Touch me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” Then to drive home the point he asks them this question: “have you anything here to eat?”

People who are dead don’t need food; they never get hungry. Only a living person needs to eat. At birth one of our first needs is to eat. A sign we are at the end of our lives is when we no longer want to, or no longer are able to eat. Living People eat. Eating with the disciples is Jesus way of telling them he is alive. “They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate in their presence.”

Have you anything to eat? This is one of the 307 questions Jesus asks in the gospels. I believe in asking the question “have you anything to eat? He was teaching something important about life, and the flourishing of life we call salvation. Salvation is relational. In asking the disciples for food, Jesus is teaching that life – and food – is something enjoyed together. If Jesus had just needed calories he could have made a piece of fish appear out of nothing. He was the Son of God after all. But he didn’t do that. Instead he asked the disciples to give him something to eat. He depended on them. Just like in the desert, at the start of his ministry, during his forty days in the wilderness, when Jesus needed calories, he could have turned stones to bread like the devil tempted him to do. But Jesus refused. He chose instead to show his dependence on God. “.....we do not live by bread alone, but by everything that come from the mouth of the Lord.” Now the risen Christ asks the disciples “have you anything here to eat?” to show that he and all of us are dependent on God working through each other. “ You give me something to eat.”

When Jesus appeared to them alive in Jerusalem that Easter night, this was not what they expected. This aliveness – the resurrection – breaks open all their ideas of nature being fixed and predictable. The dominant world view at the time said that

the cosmos was stable, enduring, eternal. Jesus' aliveness calls that into question. God can act outside the predictable, stable order of things as we have come to expect. Their current ideas of how the world is and will be no longer apply. God is doing something completely new. Jesus' aliveness calls forth something in us. In his presence, the disciples came alive in a new way. For them and us, Jesus' aliveness draws us out of ourselves. A few verses later the disciples will be called by Jesus to leave Judea and go to Samaria and to the ends of the earth to witness to Jesus' aliveness. The story of what happens next (in the book of Acts) shows the first disciples coming alive in some extraordinary ways. This coming alive in new ways in the presence of the risen Christ happens to disciples together. It happens in community. Salvation is relational. It happens around a table. It happens when someone expresses a need – when someone asks “Have you anything to eat?” and that hunger is satisfied by others

Chapter 25 of Matthew's gospel describes the final judgment. In the last of three parables there, Jesus says when we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those who are in prison, we are feeding, clothing, visiting me. In the process of doing these things we are saved – we come alive in unexpected ways. Have anything to eat? St. John Chrysostom asked the people of 5<sup>th</sup> C. Antioch that question. “Do you have anything to share with Christ?” John Chrysostom was known as a “church father.” His writings had a powerful effect on the thinking of Christians through the early centuries of the church. He preached practical sermons. He condemned the wealthy for refusing to care for the poor. As archbishop of Constantinople he refused to hold lavish parties like his predecessors. Instead he founded hospitals in that city that cared for the poor. Again and again he called Christians to remember that our obligation to feed those who are hungry. “Do you wish to honor the Body of Christ? Do not despise him when he is naked. Do not honor him here in the church building with silks, only to neglect him outside, when he is suffering from cold.....Feed the hungry and then come an decorate the table.”

A few years later, Benedict of Nursia asked the others in his religious community “Have you anything to eat?” Benedict believed visitors were to be treated as though he/she were Christ himself. This is the origin of monastic hospitality, which gave rise to hostels, hospitals, monasteries and abbeys as places of refuge. Some of these became retreat centers we have today. We have a retreat center in Baraboo: Durward’s Glen. It is used by groups and individuals who want time away to get closer to God. Durward’s Glen was once a training ground for members of the religious order of St. Camillus whose members care for the sick. They wear a red cross on their robes, which was the inspiration for the red cross which today is a universal symbol of the willingness to help those in need.

Luke House is a community meal program in Madison on South Ingersoll Street. It is meant for the homeless, those experiencing food insecurity, those who are lonely, addicted or experiencing mental health problems. Luke House is, for anyone and everyone. You can’t just volunteer to come and cook and/or serve food. Part of a volunteer’s role is to eat with the people who are there. It’s part of our Christian tradition around eating. Eating is relational, not just about getting calories.

Some of you had the joy of working on the Food for Kidz project at the high school in February, spearheaded by Paige Goeckermann and her friend Jenny from the high school Rotary club. Food for Kidz is a program that packages nutritious meals and send them nationally and internationally to those in need. Church and civic groups organize large scale packing events, like the one held at Baraboo High School in February. That first shift worked so hard, so efficiently that the second group was done early! What most of us will remember that day was the feeling of being part of a community – being alive in a way that would have been impossible if we any of us worked alone.

So, here's what all this has to do with us. Jesus asks us the question "have you anything to eat?" This question shows his need, his vulnerability. This question points to the fact that the flourishing of life is something that happens with others. Salvation is relational. In our world today there is great need. Things are shifting; life including the weather is not predictable as it once was. People wonder: Will technology save us? Will God come down and fix everything? We wake up at night and wonder "who will save us?" Who will meet their needs? Who will meet my needs? There is devastation from flooding in Sauk county this week. We have been experiencing near record flooding: storms, closed roads, questions about evacuations, emergency shelters, sandbagging, water levels being watched closely on area rivers. Justin Kern, American Red cross spokesperson quoted in on Wednesday's Baraboo "News Republic." . "Make sure you are checking on your neighbors and looking out for people in your communities." This Friday at the Wisconsin Conference Center there is a training from 9 to 5 about how you can become part of an emergency response team, helping victims of flooding in Dane County. We know that United Methodists, and people of good will, will answer that call. This will be one response to Jesus' question "Have you anything here to eat?"

For Christians when it comes to eating and drinking there are no "drive throughs". The flourishing of life in Jesus' name happens face to face, with others. Salvation -- coming fully alive -- happens in community. It's very much like a meal for all of us together. In a few minutes we get a little taste of that meal, a little bit of the heavenly banquet where we share what we have, and God's presence comes alive for us again and again. Thanks be to God.....