

April 15, 2018 – The Second Sunday of Easter  
Pastor Erin Bouman, Irving Park Lutheran Church  
Luke 24:36-48

### Teenagers

In today's holy scripture, the latter part of 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel according to Luke, our risen Lord sounds like a teenager, like a restless, ravenous, and playful teenager. Does it not sound like a teenager you might know, or have, to do what Jesus does? Pop into the room, open up the fridge, and ask whoever happens to be in earshot, "What can I eat?"

When teenagers ask, "What can I eat?" it can be hard to believe it, because they often ask it while staring into a fridge full of food. It's hard for the disciples to believe it when Jesus asks it, because it's not like he just skipped lunch. He just skipped out of the grave. He's just come back from the dead. And he was also just coming from another meal. Like a teen who can eat, and then eat again ten minutes later, in today's gospel reading the hungry Jesus has just left another dinner gathering. Today's Easter story follows directly after the Road to Emmaus story, the one where Jesus is walking on the road with two people who don't recognize him, and then they invite him in to dinner, and it is then, in the breaking of the bread, it's while they are eating together, that the other two disciples suddenly realize, "Hey, it's Jesus!" And then Jesus disappears, only to appear in another place a few verses later, and ask for yet more food.

And the way Jesus appears sound like a teenager, too. He makes a sudden entrance, all but bursts into the room, appears out of nowhere, as teenagers do, attracting attention and always in motion. As with many young people there's a restlessness to him; he's on the go, his body can barely contain all this potential, all this energy.

The holiness of the Bible, the deep and solemn respect we have for it, should not stop us from hearing how active Jesus is, and that he is enjoying himself. In this particular story, especially, I think Jesus is having fun, maybe even teasing. First of all, there's the way he introduces himself. It's late at night, maybe it was a dark and stormy night, as the disciples huddle together, nervously, and then Jesus appears and says, "Boo!" Actually Jesus says, "Peace be with you," but the effect on the disciples is as of a sudden scare. They practically jump out of their skin; they think they are seeing a ghost. And then Jesus asks, all innocently, or maybe with a grin, "Why are you scared?" And then he starts showing them some cool things about this body, like a teenager who wants you watch how they can flip a water bottle upside down, or bend their fingers backwards, or jump up and touch the ceiling. Jesus sounds high-spirited, which, if you think about it, is perfectly fitting, theologically; it conveys a kind of Trinitarian unity that the Son of God is high-spirited. And then Jesus announces that he is hungry, and then he eats something, right in front of the disciples. The way the gospel puts it, it almost sounds like Jesus is eating while standing there with the fridge door open, didn't even bother to get a plate and take a seat.

The point of all of this is not that Jesus is an adolescent—though the resemblances should make us think more carefully, more reverentially of an often disparaged age. The point of all of this is that resurrection is not a figment of our imagination. All of this is further testimony to the tactile and gracious truth of incarnation and resurrection, that God is not an ethereal idea, but a love so powerful that it takes on flesh. All of this is another way of saying something that is crucial and basic to Christian faith, that the finite becomes a vessel for the infinite, that the infinite comes to be with us, to save us.

This is all very hard for the disciples to digest. Note the phrase that so wonderfully illustrates this, as the story says, "while in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering."

This reaction is also remarkable, because these disciples have just heard from the two about what happened in Emmaus, and then not a breath later Jesus himself is there with them, too. The resurrected Christ is spitting out fish bones, and they're still not quite sure what to think.

We can remember this, when we have doubts. When we are disbelieving and still wondering we can recognize how much we have in common with the first disciples. We can be like them, further, as we read further on in the story. We can hear how, after that initial shock, their minds are opened. The story tells us that this happens after they gather around the eating Jesus. I'm sure the disciples were eating, too. I'm sure Jesus shared his food—he was always sharing food. It was a practice of his. He was quite religious about it. He takes a final bite, swallows, and then explains to his fear-consumed friends what has been written about him in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms. And it is then that their minds are opened. It is then that they understand the scriptures. Belief comes to them after the eating.

So it is that today's story makes me think of young people, even younger than teens, little children who have begun taking Holy Communion. They don't understand the fullness of the sacrament—adults must admit that neither do we—but as they grow, as they are taught the scriptures and what this meal is about, they grow in belief—which is also true for people of every age. It makes me think maybe we ought to swap our order of worship, have communion first, and then hear the scriptures.

But most of all, today's story makes me think that we are all teenagers—or that we all should be teenagers, because, as we say at the end of worship, we are Christ's risen body in the world. Now that the Son has returned to the Father and sent us the Spirit, the only hands and feet Christ has are ours. We should use them, as Jesus did, we should use our bodies to proclaim repentance and forgiveness with the audacity, and humor, and hunger, of adolescents. As Methodist bishop and writer Will Willomon says, the church ought to emulate teenagers, because they, better than anyone else, exhibit the liveliness of life in Christ. Teenagers get the spirit of being given the Spirit. Teenagers see a big old building, a tall, spreading tree, a rock-strewn cliff and say, "I bet I could climb that, and then carve my name on it." Teenagers say, "Flaming Hot Cheetos? Yeah, I'll eat that!" Think, too, of the intensity of teenage attraction, of the crush that fills one's whole being. Think of the fierceness of love that is felt by people that age. I think of that song by Niko Case, *That Teenage Feeling*, the title is repeated and perfectly evoked in its longing, melodic line, "I'm holding out for that teenage feeling!"

That feeling, that passion, is within us still, we who are no longer teens. We have it inside of us, we've just become adept at tamping it down, at telling ourselves it's not realistic. That's because as adults we have acceded to another belief system, which we rarely question: that belief that as grown-ups, we should all be cynics. We tell ourselves that. And then some teenagers show us the gospel. Some teenagers who have experienced death, who have watched their classmates be gunned down, rise up and say "Never Again." Some teenagers take their bodies to rooms of politicians and say, "What are you afraid of?" and "We need peace." Some teenagers create a movement, lead marches, start petitions, post videos, write poems, perform dances, give speeches, are witnesses, as Jesus calls us to be. They are witnesses. They show us: this is what resurrection looks like.