

Soup's On!

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church, Rev. Mary Koon

April 19, 2020

I am glad to share a meal with you virtually...to do something so familiar in a new way.

An agape meal is a time for Christian fellowship. It is often shared when regular communion isn't possible, like when folks are on retreat without a person to administer the sacrament, or when there's a desire for a more informal and spontaneous meal.

Agape is the Greek word for God's self-giving love for God's people, the love we have for God and one another.

Although its origins in the early church are connected with the origins of communion, the two are distinct. An Agape meal is not a sacrament of bread and juice, but a full meal with stories and conversation.

In the spirit of spontaneity and informality, we will begin our mealtime together by singing Johnny Appleseed, as we often do on Wednesday nights. As my mom used to say, "Soup's On!"

Let's sing together....Oh, the Lord is good to me... *(It's in your bulletin)*

Christ is a life affirmer, and eating affirms life.

Jesus loved to eat and drink with all kinds of people. The gospels are filled with stories of Jesus dining, parables about parties and teachings about feeding the hungry. So important was mealtime to Jesus that he ate with the disciples after he was resurrected.

Food is critical to our wellbeing...we need to tend to our bodies before we can do anything else.

In our time of crisis, the simple, habitual act of preparing and eating daily meals can bring order and calm in the midst of chaos.

Eating itself is an act of faith, as we strengthen our bodies for the future. Eating offers us a regular time to give thanks to God for earth, home and all who work so hard to bring food to us.

Sharing food is an act of resistance, for as we feed those who are hungry, we proclaim in an embodied way, the worth and dignity of those who are vulnerable.

Our scripture comes from Luke's gospel and takes place on resurrection Sunday. It recalls a most remarkable meal. **LUKE 24:13-35**

¹³Now on that same day (the day they found the tomb empty) two of Jesus' followers were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷And Jesus said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?'

¹⁹He asked them, 'What things?'

They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.

²¹**But we had hoped** that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.'

²⁵Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah* should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’

So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

³²They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’

³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem. ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

So ends our reading and may God add a blessing to our understanding.

Prayer: O risen Christ, open our eyes to your presence in our lives. Let our hearts burn as the truth of your Word makes a home in us. AMEN

In the Easter season of 2020, it is good to remember that at the very first Easter, the disciples were scared, confused, and sad. They were out of hope.

Not altogether different than the way some of us feel now.

But Jesus didn’t leave the disciples alone on the road to figure it out, and Jesus doesn’t leave us alone either. God is always at work in the world, in our lives, even when we cannot see it.

On that dusty and discouraged road to Emmaus, Jesus, in the guise of a stranger, appears as if from nowhere, sidling up to the group...saying, “Hey, what are you guys talking about?”

I wonder if the fear and grief that the disciples experienced so turned them inward that they could not recognize Jesus when he was right next to them. But then, despite their downcast spirit, they extended hospitality to Jesus – they asked him to stay for supper.

It wasn’t Jesus’ brilliant grasp of historical events or deep scriptural insight that opened their eyes to his presence.

It was eating with him.

Dining together, it came clear – the disciples saw Jesus.

The encounter gave them hope to continue, to take another step into the future.

Poet and artist Jan Richardson writes, “Hope is not always comforting or comfortable. Hope asks us to open ourselves to what we do not know, to pray for illumination in this life, to imagine what is beyond our imagining, to bear what seems unbearable. It calls us to keep breathing when beloved lives have left us, to turn toward one another when we might prefer to turn away. Hope draws our eyes and hearts toward a more whole future but propels us also into the present, where Christ waits for us to work with him toward a more whole world now.” <https://paintedprayerbook.com/2014/11/19/so-that-you-may-know-the-hope/>

We are people of hope. Optimism, or focusing on the positive, doesn’t have the grit and heft to meet us in this time of challenge.

Our hope rests in God, who redeems and makes new. Hope does not ask us to ignore suffering, but, by God’s grace, meets us there. Hope is a muscle that we can exercise and practice. I think hope can be contagious.

In this point in our Agape meal, I would invite you to share a specific story about where you saw Christ this week. A story that inspired hope. Here are a couple of your stories and mine:

This chocolate croissant is a gift from Katie Propsom, a college junior who grew up in this church. Katie has quietly been leaving treats for our worship team at the door of the church each Sunday since we’ve been filming live without a congregation as an offering of love and encouragement. Eating her baked goods is like eating a prayer.

This week we saw some of the stories of medical and hospital personnel around the country and ways they are celebrating when COVID-19 patients get better. I read about a hospital in MI that plays the Beatles’ song, “Here Comes the Sun” when someone comes off a ventilator, and saw videos from different hospitals of personnel making up cool dances or lining hallways and cheering when a COVID-19 patient is released from the hospital.

This week, teacher Cece asked the young children of Oak Grove how they showed kindness last week – some of them shared that they are sending notes and pictures to family and friends. I know that many of you are keeping in touch with cards and letters. Jim and I have been the recipients of such kindnesses. In a Synod meeting, Deb DeMeester expressed that when she writes notes, she pictures the words, the notes becoming like birds, perched on April branches, singing songs of hope.

Out of a sense of gratitude and blessing, some of you let me know that you will share your stimulus check with those who have need, sharing hope.

I also learned that on Easter, one of our members who has internet held her phone to her computer during the service so a fellow member without internet could hear it in real time. And Mac Davis is making DVDs of our services for those who need them.

These are just a quick sample of stories. I, we, would love to hear more!

In this Easter season, may God open our eyes to see Christ in our ordinary lives, filling us with hope. And by God's grace, when it is safe in the not-so-distant future, we will dine together in person breaking one loaf.

I want to close by reading you a note that my husband, Jim, received from 11-year-old Allan, in response to the death of Jim's mother in March. It's something that he will treasure forever.

It is a picture of a tree, and it reads, "We are all connected." Thanks, Allan, for reminding us of a truth grounds us in hope.

Thanks be to God.