

Have You Anything to Eat? By Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. X2060423
John 20:19-31 and Luke 24:36-48
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 23 April, 2006

In our family we used to play a card game called, “I doubt it.” This is a game of skill not so much at cards as it is at lying. The object is to get rid of all of your cards by going around the table in numerical card order and in your turn, declaring the number of cards you have in the denomination called for. If, when it is your turn, you are to declare fives, and you don’t have any fives, then you put down some cards face down and lie. When you are challenged by someone who says, “I doubt it,” you have to pick up all of the cards which have been previously laid down. If you’re not lying, and someone says, “I doubt it.”, you reveal your cards and the challenger must pick up the pile of cards. You quickly learn to be careful with your doubting.

We doubt much as Twenty-first Century people. We doubt supermarket price scanners, politicians who say, “Trust me”, and advertisements on TV which use trick photography to sell us things. I doubt that I can drive an SUV under water, watch sharks swim above me, and then drive easily out of the water and onto a drivable beach. I doubt that a realtor is going to fly in a balloon to meet me on a camping trip.

We are a skeptical people. We are like the disciple Thomas. Thomas came back late to the room in which the other disciples were gathered on that first Easter. They told him Jesus had appeared to them. Thomas said, “I doubt it!” He would not believe Jesus had risen from dead unless he could touch Jesus’ wounds himself. Thomas could have gotten along well in this century. He would want to see scientific proof or results of studies before he believed someone’s claim. That is not so bad. We should not believe everything everyone tells us or things that don’t have good solid basis.

The problem is, many areas of life are not based on solid proof. Areas of religion and faith are fuzzy. Competing claims and preachers’ pronouncements produce confusion. We become skeptical, and say, “I doubt it.” If you have doubts, you are in good company. Peter, Mary, Paul, Augustine, Martin Luther, Erasmus, Campbell, Bonhoeffer, and Niebuhr all were doubters. Their skepticism led each of them to deep conviction in Christian faith.

The story of Thomas is one of two post-resurrection stories we heard this morning. We also heard one from Luke, same place, same time, different reporter. The disciples were eating a fish dinner. The disciples liked fish. Many were fishers before becoming disciples, so they knew how to catch and cook fish. Jesus came through a closed door and asked them, “Have you anything here to eat?” It sounded like a strange request, but it wasn’t really. The disciples thought that they were seeing a ghost. Not only were they frightened, they were skeptical. Jesus knew what was going through their minds, so he asked for a fish. He ate it, and it was consumed. The disciples now knew that he was not a ghost, not a collective dream, but he was real.

The early hearers of the stories about Jesus’ resurrection were just as skeptical as we are. The disciples could now say, “He ate a fish, and it was consumed. We know his resurrection was for real. Look: here’s a fishbone!”

There is another reason for this story’s being in Luke’s gospel. The Gnostics of Second Century said Jesus was not real— he did not suffer bodily pain. This little scene says Jesus was very much real, very much did suffer pain on the cross, and was very much risen in the flesh.

The world we live in is the real world, the world given to us by God. Jesus is the real person God gave us to teach us how to live in the real world, and God asks us to take care of this real

world and the real people within it. John says his words are included in his gospel “ so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”¹ Luke’s story ends with Jesus’ sending the disciples out as witnesses to his wonderful deeds and teachings. To God’s request, there is no, “I doubt it.”

When people come to this church, they ask same question Jesus asked: “Have you anything here to eat? How will we respond? They’re not asking for food. They would go to a restaurant to get that. They are looking to be spiritually fed.

God knows we need spiritual feeding. The rapper named Proof, a member of the group D12 was shot to death on April 11 after a fight at an after-hours club in Detroit. I looked up some of the lyrics of his rap but I can’t repeat them here. One of Proof’s idols was Kurt Cobain, lead singer of “grunge rock” group “Nirvana.” Some of Nirvana’s lyrics include, “I’m bored and old,” “I Hate Myself and Want to Die”, and “Rape Me.” Here is a teen rock idol who had no reason to live and was telling the young people who listened to his music that they had no reason to live either. Cobain and Proof were young men who were not spiritually nourished when they were young.

Do you see what you are here for this morning? God calls us to share our spiritual food with young people to give them hope and to give their lives meaning beyond themselves. How can anyone be bored today with so many homes to be re-habilitated, with so many poor children who need to be tutored and educated, with so many lonely old people who would love to have someone read to them or write letters for them.

We have something to share with those who come in here looking for something to eat. We can share our cookies, coffee, tea, and fellowship, yes. We can offer a listening ear, yes. But greater than anything else, we can share what *we* have found here. Here is this table in the chancel. We regularly place on it the bread and the wine– the body and life-giving blood of Jesus Christ. It is a gift from God which points beyond us. It gives our lives eternal meaning. We will share it with those who come looking for spiritual food. Because of Jesus Christ, whom this table represents, we can rise above our skepticisms and doubts.

Jesus Christ gives us life. Then he asks us, “Have you anything here to eat? Do you give strangers spiritual food? Do you offer food to the hungry of Alamance County?”

What is our response to Jesus?

It is not bad to be skeptical, like Thomas. May our skepticism be a blessed one and lead to faith in God’s love for us.

And, take to heart Jesus’ words which he spoke in both post-resurrection scenes: “Peace be with you.” Wherever you go, whatever you do, whatever doubts you may have, may you feel Jesus’ peace in your heart.

¹John 20:31