

Title: Real Presence

Date: 5/1/2022 (Easter 3, Year C)

Location: St. Alban's Episcopal Church

Service: 10am Holy Eucharist (Hybrid)

Readings: [Acts 9:1-6, \(7-20\)](#); [Revelation 5:11-14](#); [John 21:1-19](#); [Psalm 30](#)

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/8gw5qoTMeUw?t=1167>

O God, your beloved Son made himself known to the disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him and join him in all his redeeming work.¹ Amen.

As I mentioned last week, on Easter Day we always read one of the accounts of the resurrection and on the Second Sunday of Easter we always read about Thomas. On the Third Sunday of Easter, we always read about something near and dear to my heart...food.

My love language is food. I came by it honestly; it is the love language of my family, the love language of my people. When I visited my grandmothers and my aunts, their first question was always, 吃飯了沒? 吃飽了沒? “Have you eaten yet?” “Have you had enough to eat?” From them, I learned that offering food is the same thing as offering love.

I learn new cities through food. Right now there is so much for me to learn and to take in. In these first two months in Austin, the easiest way for me to get to know this city has been to pick a coffee shop or a place that's been recommended to me, and then go explore that neighborhood.

In this first month as your rector, the best way for me to get to know all of you have been through these meet and greets. We've had seven so far, and it's been an amazing way to sit and listen to each other stories and talk about the questions on our hearts and minds.

Before I arrived, what I knew about Austin was what I read in the news, and what I knew about St. Alban's was what I read in the parish profile and what I learned through the search committee. It is through food that people and places here in Austin have become more present and real to me.

On the third Sunday of Easter, it is through food that Jesus becomes more present and real to his disciples.

In Year A, we get the Emmaus Story from the gospel according to Luke. Jesus meets two of his disciples on the road out of Jerusalem. He keeps these two from recognizing him and ends up walking next to them and interpreting to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. When they reach the village of Emmaus, they invite him to stay with them.

When they were at table, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them.

Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. That very hour, they returned to Jerusalem to share what Jesus made known to them on the road and in the breaking of the bread (Lk 24:13-35).²

In Year B, we get the story immediately following the Emmaus story. Jesus himself stood among the disciples. Even though he told them, “Peace be with you,” they reacted the same way many people in the Bible react to angels. They were startled and terrified, and they think they’re seeing a ghost. After he invited them to look at and touch his hands and feet, they allowed themselves to feel a sense of joy. But they were still more than a little bit unsure; they still couldn’t quite let themselves believe.

So, he asked them for a piece of broiled fish.

He took it and ate it in their presence, then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures (LK 24:36b-48).³

In Year A, we get bread and in Year B we get fish, but in both cases, food is linked to the disciples’ recognition of Jesus, and Jesus is linked to interpreting and understanding the scriptures. Jesus became more present and real to them when they shared the bread and the fish after the resurrection.

He wasn’t just a role model, he wasn’t just their beloved and revered teacher. Having witnessed his resurrection, they believed he was truly the Son of God and the Son of Mary. The more present and real Jesus was to them after his death and resurrection, the more present and more real Jesus’ interpretation of the scripture became to them. The words he shared and the work he did took on new power, new authority.

When we look at all these versions of the gospel, we learn a lot by looking at the parts where they are similar and the parts where they are different. You might ask if the details that are similar are more important, or if the details that are different are more important. The answer is clearly, “Yes.”

In Year C, in this account from the gospel according to John, we get fish AND bread, and something more.

After Jesus appeared behind closed doors and made himself known to the disciples not once but twice, they decide to get out of town. Their world had been turned upside down, so they decide to go back to a familiar place to do a familiar thing.⁴ They go fishing on the Sea of Tiberias, also known as the Sea of Galilee.

They don’t have much luck. Maybe they were a little out of practice after a three-year break from fishing. Maybe they weren’t that focused on catching fish. Whatever the reason, after a night of fishing, they caught a grand total of zero fish.

They were so desperate or just plain ol’ tired that they decided to take advice from the random guy standing on the beach. Not only was he shouting at them from the beach, he called them children!

Still, when he told them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, they did exactly as he said. They didn't argue with him, they didn't ignore him, and they weren't defensive. No one said, "Why should we listen to you?" or "We've tried that before and it didn't work." They did exactly what he told them to do, and now they had caught so many fish in the net they couldn't haul it in.

By the time they got themselves and all their fish to shore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Even though Jesus asked them to bring the fish they caught, he had breakfast ready and waiting for them. And this time, they didn't have to ask who he was; by the time they got to shore they recognized him.

In the Biblical commentaries I read, the authors couldn't make sense of the 153 fish. Numbers in the Bible have significance. "Forty" means a lot. "Twelve" often refers to the twelve tribes of Israel. "Three" is an important number. But 153?

Jesus already had fish on the fire for the disciples. They didn't have freezers to store the rest. What would they have done with all that fish?

I wonder...if they gave it all away. They didn't have freezers to store all of it. They wouldn't have caught any of it were it not for Jesus, so the fish didn't really feel like theirs, per se. Maybe they grilled the fish and shared them with other people on the beach who were hungry. Maybe they sold the fish and gave away the money they made.

After all, three times Jesus asked, "Simon Son of John, do you love me?" Three times Simon Peter answered, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." The first time Jesus said, "Feed my lambs," then "Tend my lambs" and finally, "Feed my sheep."

Perhaps the love of God, and our love for God, is more present and more real when it is given away.

Jesus didn't tell Simon Peter, "Build me a church."

Jesus didn't say, "Write down my words."

Jesus didn't say, "Tell them about all the people I healed, all the miracles I performed, and all the demons I cast out."

But Jesus knew that if Simon Peter fed his sheep and tended his lambs, people will be drawn together to remember his words and his works, and those words and works will take on new power and new authority.

When our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry says that the Way of Jesus is loving, liberating and life-giving, he is calling on us to make the love of God more present and real in this world. In making the love of God more present and real, we are making more present and real the words and works of Jesus.

Sometimes we know what we have in abundance, sometimes it takes a stranger, or Jesus in the guise of a stranger, to point out that we are more than we think we are, that we have more than we think we have.

It's over there to the right, just beneath the surface. When we find it, it is not ours to keep, but it is ours to give away.

This coming week I invite you to ask yourself, and I'd love to hear the answer:

What is the love that I will give away?

¹ Adapted from the Collect of the Day, Third Sunday of Easter

² https://lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Easter/AEaster3_RCL.html

³ https://lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Easter/BEaster3_RCL.html

⁴ Jones, G. D. (2009). [Pastoral Perspective on John 21:1–19](#). In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year C* (Vol. 2, p. 420). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.