

Sermon † April 18, 2021

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Did you hear what Jesus asked? Is it just me, or is that a rather mundane question in the face of miraculous events? *"Have you anything here to eat?"*

Jesus had been murdered—sometimes when we say crucified we forget how brutal and unjust it was—Jesus had been murdered, put in a tomb, come back to life, and was with the disciples. The world had been forever changed and Jesus asked, *"Have you anything here to eat?"* The events around which millions would later build their faith have just occurred, and this is the question being asked by the central figure?

What if that was the most pressing issue in other situations? *"Congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien, it's a boy."* *"Oh good, got any pretzels?"* or *"Excuse me, Mr. President, We've captured Saddam Hussein."* *"That's great, hey, have you seen that Pizza Hut coupon?"*

"Have you anything here to eat?"

Jesus has been raised from the dead, the spirit of God is loose in the world, and that's the question at hand? . . . sometimes it is.

There is a long line of cars moving slowly in front of you. One car is full of people, another's front seat is at capacity, but in most of the cars a solitary figure sits. Finally, the voice speaks to you from behind the colorful menu. You send one finger between the two cushions of the passenger's seat in search of correct change. Now the cars are lined up behind you. You trade some money for some food and drive off—meal time in 21st century America.

Have you anything here to eat?

People's schedules get wild:

"Don't wait on me, honey. You go ahead and eat."

"Yeah, mom, glad I caught you. I'm going to stay at school and wait for tonight's game to start. You eat without me."

"Sorry kids, have to stay over another night. Won't be home for dinner after all."

Have you anything here to eat?

A new phrase has been added to our modern lexicon—*food insecurity*. Those starving children on the television commercials look so forsaken. Our attention is not just arrested by their bloated stomachs but by the loneliness in their eyes. The lack of food does more than destroy their bodies from malnourishment, it cuts them off from the human community. It is the intimacy of the table that they miss as much as the food. When food finally comes, we drop it in bags from helicopters.

Have you anything here to eat? Yes, yes, we have something here to eat.

In my boyhood home, we always ate Sunday dinner in the dining room. It was always chicken. It sometimes felt like we had two communion services—one at church and one at home. The one at church was the more formal, the one of meditation and reflection and prayer. The one around the family table was less formal, but opportunities presented themselves for sharing life in a significant way, one which amplified for us the meaning of the Supper in the recently concluded service.

Many of the close relationships that you and I have with other people began with a meal and are strengthened by an occasional meal together. It is no accident that when we really want to get to know people, we invite them over for dinner. Something happens when we eat together. Something happens when we sit around a table, face to face, and share our food and our stories and our lives with one another.

Yes, we have something here to eat.

When our girls were still at home, I cannot remember an excuse or reason strong enough for us not to gather to eat at least the evening meal together. It may have meant eating at 4:30 one afternoon and at 7:00 the next evening, but it was understood that we ate together. We ate in the dining room, oftentimes with classical music in the air and soft candlelight on the table. The sharing of the evening meal provided the opportunity to stop long enough to rest, take notice of one another, give thanks, and be renewed.

Yes, we have something here to eat.

As one person has noted, in the Bible the table is an image for communication between people. If we are going to save the table, which means the family—our family, the church family, the human family—then we have to be willing to eat together. "*We have to stick together or we'll starve to death,*" and the starvation is more than physical hunger.

Yes, we have something here to eat.

A seminary professor told her students that the most intimate experience people share is eating a meal. When we eat together we open our lives to one another while meeting one of our most basic needs. As we become vulnerable enough to eat with one another, we develop relationships that will lead us to sharing life more deeply.

After we have eaten with each other in other places, the sharing of the Lord's Supper carries a deeper meaning for us, just as sharing the Eucharist together causes the informal meals of our lives to take on a new meaning.

If eating a meal together is the most intimate time we know, then that explains why meal time for people who live by themselves can be lonely, and why the starving children look so forsaken, and why food means more to a homeless person than it may mean to us. It also explains why we should go out of our way to channel resources and time and energy and presence to be with those people. That is so much preferred to simply sending hungry people to the store with a voucher for groceries.

We are the ones who receive the blessing of recognizing Jesus in the least of these. We go to others with the offer of food, and we return having been fed.

Yes, we have something here to eat.

For most of my ministry at each congregation I served, Wednesday morning during the school year meant high school breakfast. It was open to all high school students. Every Wednesday, a loyal crew of helpers showed up at church at 6:00 a.m. (or earlier) to prepare biscuits fresh from the oven, topped with eggs and bacon, French toast, pancakes and, yes, chocolate shakes. At some locations, we served as many as 50 students on a Wednesday morning. Our only rule was—no electronics. No cell phone. No tablets or laptops. Instead there were always animated conversations and plenty of laughter.

I'm sure that they probably didn't think about it in this way . . . but as they shared this first meal of the day, they were also sharing in the great human family that depends on each other not only for food but for comfort and support and encouragement and fellowship.

Why do we enjoy eating with others? When we sit down with one another there is nourishment for bodies and spirits. A meal that only provides physical nourishment is but a snack from which we will soon be hungry again. A true meal happens within a community where our hearts and souls are fed healthy portions of the most intimate kind of love.

People look for nourishment in many ways and sometimes we underestimate the power of a meal. Sometimes we feel like we need more affirmation. Sometimes those who are lonely, or wish they were alone, find it difficult to accept coming together as the answer. When we are at table and share a meal we see each other face to face and talk with one another heart to heart. What a wonderful thing to know that we have something here to eat.

And it's almost time to share our meal. The family is together. The table has been set. We are hungry in all the ways that humans can be hungry.

And . . . *"Have you anything here to eat?"* . . . doesn't seem like such an odd question after all.

