

# Story and Meditation: Best Meal Ever

April 26, 2020

Third Sunday of Easter

Luke 24:13-35

by *Eric Anderson*

The young koa'e kea had a dream. He wanted to eat.

In his life thus far, he considered, he hadn't done a lot of eating. By his standards, he hadn't done any eating. The time inside the egg he didn't really remember very well, but he was pretty sure that he hadn't eaten anything there. Since then, he must admit, he'd had meals. He didn't think those counted as eating either. Because, you see, mom or dad would return from hunting over the ocean, where they'd been catching and eating their food. He'd open his beak, and mom or dad would stick their beak down his throat and...

Well, it satisfied his hunger. But if you didn't taste it – if you didn't even want to think about tasting it – did it count as eating? He didn't think so.

Oh, for a meal that didn't involve... yuck.

Because seriously: Yuck.

Finally, the day came when his parents took him on a long flight from the pali where they'd built their nest down to the ocean and far out over it. To his delight, he watched them hover over portion of the sea with shimmering below it. First one dived, and then the other, and as he circled overhead, they emerged with something dangling from their beaks.

It was... oh, yuck. It was a squid.

Suddenly eating looked a lot less attractive.

After a few minutes, his parents rejoined him, wondering why he hadn't tried his own first dive and his first squid. "Oh, no," he said. "You're not getting me to try that. Yuck yuck yuck yuck yuck."

"I really want a meal that doesn't involve yuck!"

"Well, here's the thing," said his mother. "I can tell you that it tastes good all day long, but that doesn't matter because you don't have to believe it. You've got to try it, because now that you can fly this far, you have to fish for yourself. We're not going to do your hunting for you."

Frankly, the idea of having what he'd just seen be thrust down his throat after being... well, it was even yuckier than it had been, except that he wouldn't have to taste it.

He watched them fish for a while, and his stomach rumbled even louder than the rush of air along his feathers. At last, with a sigh that startled all the other seabirds nearby, he pointed his beak at a squid, let himself dive, and grabbed at it with his beak, trying to keep his tongues from touching it.

He floated on the surface briefly with a truly puzzled look on his face. In the effort of swimming to the surface, he couldn't keep his tongue away from the squid. And it didn't taste yucky. In fact, it tasted... amazing.

He swallowed it down.

His parents landed next to him. "Well?" asked his mother.

"That," he said, "was the best meal ever."

The funny thing about the resurrection of Jesus was how quietly it happened. The stories recorded in the New Testament rarely speak of large groups of people. No more than three women at the tomb. Ten men around a table at day's end. Mary Magdalene, just Mary alone. Peter, just Peter alone. And, of course, Cleopas and his unnamed companion who walked some miles with Jesus and didn't know who he was.

Debie Thomas writes at *Journey with Jesus*, "I notice a quiet resurrection. One would think that a God who suffers a torturous and wholly unjust death would come back with a vengeance, determined to shout his triumph from the rooftops, and prove his accusers and killers wrong. But Jesus does no such thing..."

"Instead, on the evening of his greatest victory, the risen Christ takes a walk. He takes a leisurely walk on a quiet, out-of-the-way road. When he notices two of his followers walking ahead of him, he approaches them in a guise so gentle, so understated, and so mundane, they don't recognize him.

"This is not, I'll admit, what I always want from the resurrected Christ. 'But we had hoped' he'd be more dramatic. More convincing. More unmistakably divine. We had hoped he'd make post-Easter faith easier."

I could use some help in making post-Easter faith easier. Faith usually means believing not so much in a beneficent present as believing in a more gentle future. A few years ago, there was an effort to tell young people at high risk for suicide that "it gets better." If you can believe that it gets better, then you have more resources to endure whatever hardships are before you. Deferred gratification – the ability to wait for a cookie – is something human beings learn, and watching a child learn it is one of the hardest things that a parent ever does. It is also one of our

great strengths as a living being. The apostle Paul put it in a different order in his letter to the Romans. "Suffering produces endurance," he wrote, "and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." I don't think that order is an absolute. I keep seeing hope amidst suffering producing endurance. For that matter, it seems to me that character may be one of the roots of hope.

It all weaves together, doesn't it?

Jesus did make post-Easter faith easier for Cleopas and his friend. On that long walk Jesus gave them a new way to understand himself, his purpose, and his ministry. We have had two thousand years of experience interpreting the Law and the Prophets to understand the Messiah as Jesus lived it. We forget that that had not been understood that way before. When Cleopas said that they had hoped Jesus would redeem Israel, they had something very concrete in mind, something that did not include a Roman cross. It also did not include an empty tomb. Who expects something like that?

Nobody but God, apparently.

Those ideas excited them even as sorrow and fear and confusion lingered. "Were not our hearts burning within us?" they asked each other later. The risen Jesus had not just fed them information. He had given them inspiration. I always imagine that their trip back to Jerusalem took much less time than their walk from it. Light hearts will do that.

Kirk Byron Jones writes at the Christian Century, "There is a moment of glad astonishment at the end of the walk to Emmaus with Jesus. Those who have just spent time with him notice that their hearts were burning within them. In just a short span of time and a short number of steps, they have felt more alive than ever before. This communal striding and savoring alongside Jesus has fed them the bread of life."

It also must be said that they returned fed with actual bread as well as with bread of the spirit.

"Todos los duelos con pan son buenos," wrote Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra in Don Quixote. "All sorrows are less with bread."

These two disciples of Jesus found their sorrows dispelled when he broke bread. When he fed them. When he satisfied their hungers of body and of soul.

Best. Meal. Ever.

You and I face the challenge of keeping ourselves fed in body, mind, and spirit during a pandemic. We are not the first human beings to do so. I wish I could say we will be the last.

On Friday, our Board of Deacons concluded that we should extend the time of not gathering for worship until the end of May. Although we have been very successful in limiting transmission of

COVID-19 in this state and on this island, the clusters of infected people on Maui and in Kona persuaded us that large gatherings remain very risky. Sure enough, Governor Ige announced yesterday that the state-wide stay-at-home directive will be extended through the month of May.

I confess that I am a little proud that we reached our decision before the Governor could announce his.

So we will continue to develop and extend to you food for the spirit as best we can: these online worship services, the Tuesday Bible Study on Zoom, the Wednesday songs, the every-other-Friday concerts. We will continue the special editions of the Messenger, our cards and letters, and our telephone calls.

These may not be the Best Meal Ever, but they are food for the spirit.

I also want to know about needs of food for the body. That is also in our care. If you have needs, please let me know. We will find a way. We expect to learn about more needs around our community. Somehow, we must find a way.

We must find a way to deliver the Best Meal Ever to our hungry family, neighbors, and strangers. We must find a way to see them filled in body, mind, and spirit.

We must find our way to satisfying our own hungers of body, mind, and spirit. We must sit down with Jesus and enjoy the Best. Meal. Ever.

Amen.