

Sermon Easter People Series: Ghosts don't eat. By Pastor Kit Greaves, April 18, 2021

Pray

Lord, give us a word from your word. Amen.

Ghosts don't eat. Humans do. Have you seen the ad with the Chicken saying, "Eat more beef?" The risen Jesus ate fish.

In this Easter season we are talking about Easter people, witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and the influence this fact has had for two thousand years. Easter people feed on the fact of Jesus being alive when we spend time with him and are nourished by his word and presence every day. How we feed our body, mind and soul affects how we witness.

So, tell me, what have you had to eat today? This may be early for you, but I'm going to wait 'til someone comments on Facebook before I continue. I'm serious. If we were all here in person, someone would respond, I'm sure. Comment and tell me what you've eaten today. If you are unable or choose not to comment, no worries. For those who wish to comment in another manner, I can read an email later or pick up a phone message. What have you eaten today? While you're tapping your answer, I can tell you what I've eaten: I've had a bowl of hot porridge with brown sugar, a sprinkle of cinnamon and cold 2% milk. And a cup of coffee. Black.

Ok, I see comments coming in...

I love the interaction. Thanks for all the comments. We'll get to why I'm asking, in a minute.

How we feed our mind is also important.

One of the world's great writers, Fyodor Dostoyevsky experienced a virtual resurrection. The great Russian writer Dostoyevsky was arrested in 1849 for belonging to a literary group that discussed banned books critical of Tsarist Russia. Tsar Nicholas I, who, to impress upon the young parlor radicals the gravity of their errors, sentenced Dostoyevsky and friends to death and staged a mock execution. A firing squad stood at the ready. Bareheaded, robed in white burial shrouds, hands bound tightly behind them, they were paraded through the snow before a gawking crowd. At the very last instant, as the orders, "Ready, Aim!" was heard and rifles were cocked and lifted, a horseman galloped up with a message from the Tsar: he would commute their death sentences and mercifully change their sentence to hard labour!

Dostoyevsky never recovered from the near-execution experience. He had peered into the void of death and from that moment, life became precious beyond all calculation. "Now my life will change," he said, "I shall be born again in a new form." As he boarded the train for Siberia, a devout woman handed him a New Testament, the only book permitted in prison. Believing that

God had given him a second chance to fulfill his calling, Dostoyevsky pored over that NT during his confinement. After ten years he emerged from exile with unshakeable Christian convictions, as expressed in a letter to the woman who had given him the NT, "If anyone proved to me that Christ was outside the truth...then I would prefer to remain with Christ than with the truth."

Dostoyevsky's liberal view of the inherent goodness of humanity could not account for the pure evil he found in his cell mates, having been forced to live in close quarters with thieves, murderers, and drunken peasants. His theology had to adjust to this new reality. Over time, though, he also glimpsed the image of God in the lowest of prisoners influencing the creation of unmatched characterizations in novels such as *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1869), *Demons* (1872) and *The Brothers Karamozov* (1880).

Dostoyevsky came to believe that only through being loved is a human being capable of love.

How we feed our body, mind and our soul, how we witness to the resurrection, can be seen in how we treat others, how we help others to know something of the love of God. These are signs of Easter people, who know something of the spiritual feeding and influence of the resurrection of Christ as we read in today's Gospel reading from Luke 24:36-48

"Shalom," says Jesus, which is sort of a cross between "Peace" and "Hey." It's both a meaningful greeting and a casual, everyday one. Shalom: "How's it going?" "How ya doing?" "Gday, mate." The friends did not experience Jesus' "Shalom" as funny, meaningful or casual; to them it was terrifying. They could barely cope with the trauma of their friend and leader being horribly killed, the grief, fear, doubt, uncertainty that maybe this small band of his followers are now next on Herod's most wanted list of fugitives. Now a further trauma: the dead one whom they loved, is among them, alive and acting as though nothing weird has happened! I guess we don't need to grieve?! Even good news means change and change causes a grief reaction, sadness, confusion. Since Jesus is clearly is alive again, how are they to react? Hadn't they been taught if they see the face of God they'll DIE? They knew of Roman flogging. They'd seen crucifixion. You don't survive. Yet here is Jesus, the walking dead, a pioneer zombie?

"C'mon, people. Here I am. No, really. Look at my scars," Jesus is saying. "You can touch me and see that I'm not a ghost or a zombie. It's okay." Some of them are starting to come around and then he asks for something to eat. They give him some fish and he eats in "in their presence." Luke is obviously writing for those who say that the resurrected Jesus was not physical. Jesus' choice of fish, triggers memories: a net full of fish after a night of catching nothing. Hmm. A few fish multiplied to feed a huge crowd. Twice. Hmm. The new calling: to be fishing, not for perch and trout, but for men and women.

What attracts me most, though, is **Jesus' humanness**. After three days of being closed up in a tomb, he's *hungry*. Who wouldn't be? When he walks in, his friends are so frightened they forget to show common hospitality. They don't offer him a place to sit, something to eat and drink, a traditional welcome.

He smells the food and looks over their shoulders while they are backing away from him and crowding around him in equal measure. Finally, in the midst of reassuring them, he can't wait any longer: "Uh. Do I smell fish?" Someone catches on to his hunger and goes to get him a plate, and they watch him chew and swallow. (Ghosts don't eat, do they?) As they are assessing him in a more friendly manner, he's simply having some leftovers. Broiled fish, buttered, floured, crispy. Nice. Finally, after nourishment, he's ready to engage in real conversation. "Looking back in the scriptures. You see, I've been there all along." Looking at Jesus now scarred hands and feet, his side clearly wounded but not bleeding or painful, but evident. Looking ahead: what are you going to do but never stop telling the news that life after death is real. Look to Jesus. Real God. Real human. The universal and particular, matter and energy, diversity and singularity, three-ness and one-ness, transcendent and imminent, digital and analog.

Among Prince Philip's lasting contributions was his Duke of Edinburgh's Award, established in 1956, coming to Canada in 1963. As one of the over 500,00 young Canadians who have achieved the award, my brother Lawrence Greaves, did so in high school and was awarded the Gold Standard of the D of Ed from Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother at Queen's Park, Toronto 1982. **The key elements of the Duke of Ed program:**

- Open to all, between the ages of 14 and 24.
- Three Levels Bronze, Silver, and Gold, each progressively more challenging.
- Four Sections: **Physical** Recreation, Skills, Voluntary Service, Adventurous Journey, plus Residential Project (Gold Level only).

Watching HRH Prince Philip's funeral yesterday, I was moved by several things: the light streaming in through the glorious stained glass of St George's chapel, the comfort of holy scripture, the prayers and music, the Royal family dressed in black sitting 2 meters apart, the Queen sitting alone, the fact that our minds, emotions and spirits felt drawn into their grief by the grief, loss and loneliness we have experienced and continue to experience because of the pandemic.

There was an elegance, dignity, and worshipfulness about Prince Philip's funeral. The connection I see apart from the fact that it was an Anglican service, were the final pieces of music Prince Philip chose that connect with Jesus' final words, that sum up what I see as Jesus casting vision for his disciples, at the end of Luke's Gospel.

The pipe major of The Royal Regiment of Scotland played **A Lament. Similar to how the disciples must have felt after Jesus' crucifixion.**

The buglers of the Royal Marines sounded **The Last Post. Jesus had been three days dead.**

After a period of silence, the State Trumpeters of the Household Cavalry sounded **Reveille**. **Reveille means Wake up! Get up! Jesus is somehow alive again, in the flesh, not a ghost, standing in their midst, despite locked doors, asking for something to eat!**

The buglers of the Royal Marines sounded **Action Stations**. **Jesus opens their minds so they could understand the Scriptures, that the Christ will suffer, and rise from the dead on the third day and then Jesus gives his charge, casts the vision of what's next – and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached** in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things, Jesus says.

That's Action Stations. That's us. Prince Philip, we hear you. Let's get on with it. It's not whether we'll be witnesses to Christ's resurrection as his Easter people, but how. How will you and I witness to God being alive in our life, individually, as families, as a church?

The answers will depend in part on how we fill our body, mind and soul. Will we feed the body with good things? Will the earth be a better place or worse for what we consume? Will we feed our soul with a good word? Will we challenge our mind, ask questions and be woken from any complacency?

Spirituality and relationships are so often connected to eating. It makes sense. It makes us human. We talk about "being fed" spiritually, or we call friends and dream about making plans to eat together, when the pandemic finally subsides. Eating is human. Relationships are human. Spirituality is human. Those things are linked by the realities of life. While we cannot exist without food, it's also true that our existence is deeply impaired if we lack significant relationships or some type of spiritual awareness.

That's why it's rare to experience a social gathering without food: because we sense in some elemental way that feeding our bodies, also feeds our souls and mind, and moves our relationships to deeper levels. So, I wanted to know what you're eating and we can eat together, online, food for the body, mind, and soul. We live better when we eat, especially when we eat good things, together. What word of God are you chewing? What question of God do you have stirring in your mind? What's for lunch?

Thanks be to God.

My word to chew on: Acts 3:19. "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." Acts 3:19

My 'something to think about': what do I want said or sung at my funeral?

My food: a cool glass of water and Sunday dinner with my wife Dianne, and facetime our kids.