

You Have a Reservation

In our recent preaching series called “Unbreakable”, we’ve feasted on powerful concepts found in Scripture and in observations from academic disciplines that make for strong families and communities. We’ve learned about the power of commitment and the necessity of good and frequent communication. This teaching has included showing appreciation for those in our circle and last week, we were movingly reminded of the critical importance of time spent together in making our relationships enduring and enjoyable.

This morning we continue this series by proclaiming the one thing most necessary for a resilient life and resilient relationships – time spent in the presence of God and his people. Today we join with the global Christian family in celebrating the Lord’s supper together as one holy and apostolic Church. As we gather in this peaceful place other Christians today will meet in secret, facing severe persecution for believing as they do. The faith that can make us more resilient is the faith that sustains our sisters and brothers in other places through the darkest of days.

Let’s look again at the meaning of the word “resilience”. One somewhat obscure dictionary definition puts it this way: “The capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation caused especially by compressive stress.” That sounds like how Dan Meyer will feel after completing the Chicago Marathon, or how I feel after eating a large meal.

For God’s people, whatever else gives us strength to face the hard realities of life is secondary to the power of worship. Hear what the Psalmist had to say about the worship of Almighty God:

“One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord. Hear my voice when I call O Lord; be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says of you, “Seek his face!” Your face, Lord, I will seek.” (Psalm 27: 4-8)

Human language can only point to the glory of being in the presence of God. If we can’t really see a face on God, we can be drawn into his presence. We can gaze upon the beauty of his holiness. He is the one we seek this morning.

There was once a little boy who wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of root beer and he started his journey. When he had gone about three blocks, he met an elderly woman. She was sitting in the park just staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down next to her and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink from

his root beer when he noticed the elderly lady looked hungry, so he offered her a Twinkie. She gratefully accepted it and smiled at him. Her smile was so pretty that the boy wanted to see it again, and so he offered her a root beer. Once again she smiled at him. The boy was delighted! They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling, but they never said a word. As it grew dark, the boy realized how tired he was and he got up to leave, but before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the woman, and gave her a hug. She gave him the biggest smile ever. When the boy opened the door to his own house a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" He replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!" Meanwhile, the woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her son was stunned by the look of peace on her face, and he asked, "Mother, what did you do today that made you so happy?" She replied, "I ate Twinkies in the park with God." But before her son responded, she added, "You know, he's much younger than I thought."

Today, we meet God at his table. The New Testament has many ways to tell us we are invited. Hear this familiar verse in a slightly new way: "Listen, I stand at the door, knocking. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come to you and eat with you, and you with me." (Revelation 3:20)

Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, says it simply and well in his book, Being Christian. Jesus, he reminds us, wants our company and "all are wanted guests at his table." He further reminds us that Jesus loved to have a meal with friends and strangers. He lived with an indiscriminate generosity – he seemed to especially relish being with people who thought they had no place at his table even as he brought them together in joyful celebration.

The first followers of Jesus, in the days of the early Church, frequently referred to the reality of the risen Jesus and they identified themselves as the witnesses who "ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." (Acts 10:41)

In chapter 24 of his gospel, Luke tells us that after the resurrection of Jesus, his followers found an empty tomb. Angels told them they were looking in the wrong place for Jesus. The disciples were dazed and confused. Their resilience was at a breaking point. Permit me to share that account in story rather than text.

Later that day, two of his followers were walking to a village called Emmaus – a seven-mile walk from Jerusalem. One of their names was Cleopas. Cleopas and his friend were utterly bereft and confused. Jesus had been crucified and buried. Another man came up to them as they walked on the path. They didn't recognize this stranger and were perplexed when he asked what they were discussing together. What? You don't know? You must be from out of town. They then told this stranger about Jesus – who was a really amazing prophet - a good great man – and he was going to redeem Israel.

The stranger tried to correct their thinking, but nothing became clear to them until

the three of them sat down to a shared meal. Their eyes were opened in the breaking of the bread. And then Jesus disappeared from their sight. Our eyes can be similarly opened this morning. When you receive the bread and the cup this morning, you are a part of an unbreakable family of God. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. When you share in the table of the Lord, know that you are welcome not because all is well with you. You are welcome because you need strength for the journey you face, especially if it's not going all that well.

One of the things Laurie and I have enjoyed about Chicago are the amazing options for having a great meal. The other night, with friends we went to a wonderful restaurant in the city. We were the first to arrive, so I asked if they had a reservation for us. To my delight, the highly skilled receptionist said, "Of course we do, Mr. Clark, we've been waiting for you!" That began a great night in the company of friends.