

Sermon Series: People in Motion

October 20, 2013

Title: New Life!

Text: Acts 9:36-43

Summary: Appetizers give us a preview of the main course to come. In the same way, God challenges us to invite Him to give a preview of His New Creation in life's tough situations.

Appetizers, Anyone?

First thing on the menu:

When you go out to a nice restaurant, what's the first thing you find on the menu? Chances are it's not the main entrees. Instead, it will be a list of smaller dishes called hors d'oeuvres, or "appetizers."

We can thank the ancient Romans for these tasty tidbits. The Romans were quite famous for their feasts -- think of all those pictures of people in togas holding clusters of grapes over their mouths. But to get things started, they introduced the custom of providing smaller dishes to stimulate the appetite and help their guests look forward to the main courses:

The Romans served many different appetizers to begin their banquets. The most popular items were seasoned eggs and egg-based dishes, vegetables, salad, mushrooms and truffles, assorted shellfish, cheese with herbs, olives, sausages, and even more filling dishes, such as complicated fricassees and casseroles, which today would be considered complete meals in themselves."

---A Taste of Ancient Rome, Ilaria Gozzini Giacosa [University of Chicago:Chicago] 1992 (p. 49) [book includes recipes adapted for modern kitchens]

Living in a hungry world:

We live in a hungry world. It is a world starving for the lack of God's love and justice, comfort and healing. It is a world in which there is never enough, no matter how hard we try. Like people locked out of a world-class restaurant, we can smell the aromas of wonderful dishes being prepared, meat on the grill, fresh bread in the oven, but we can't find the door. More often than not, we feel like we're left to dive the dumpster.

The fact is that we're wired to want things to *be right*. It isn't a matter of whether a person is religious or spiritually oriented. *Everyone* has an innate sense of how things "ought to be." Everyone dreams of something better than what this world can offer. Everyone has a sense of right and wrong.

But when things don't go the way we wish or know they could, we are left feeling hungry, empty, dissatisfied.

We can smell the food, but there's nothing on our plates.

Appetizers, anyone?

Jesus promised us that one day that door will be opened and God will usher us into His banquet hall to celebrate with Him what the Book of Revelation calls "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb." Jesus will be the Groom and you and I will be collectively His Bride.

But until that wonderful day, what about that gnawing hunger in our souls?

A woman who was an outsider to Judaism came to Jesus asking for Him to free her daughter from demonic oppression. When Jesus refused by saying that the food of God's Kingdom was only for the Jewish people, she replied:

Mark 7:28 NIV

"Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

In other words, "I know I'm not invited to the banquet, but could I just have an appetizer?"

Jesus response?

Mark 7:29-30 NIV

Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."

She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

It turns out that Jesus did in fact bring a plate full of appetizers to a desperate situation. And when we look at how Jesus interacted with people, we see Him sitting down with them for banquets that were a kind of *preview* of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Again, a foretaste, an hors-d oeuvre, an appetizer of the main course!

The Upper Room

Dorcas' funeral:

One day Peter found himself with a group of fellow believers in Jesus who had come face to face with the brokenness of this old world in the loss of one of their dearest members.

Acts 9:36-38 NIV

In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

Here was a woman who had been an integral part of their little Christian community. Luke tells us that she was always helping out, giving money to poor people. We can surmise that she probably died at home. The upstairs room in which they placed her body could well have been the meeting room for the little congregation. In any event, her loss affected each and every member of the fellowship. They had come face to face with the "last enemy," Death. And it seemed that Death had had the last word.

But they had heard that Peter, the apostle from Jerusalem who had been with Jesus through all of His ministry, was just a few miles away. Perhaps some of these believers had originally been part of the church in Jerusalem and had seen the miracles that God performed through Peter. Whatever the case, they dispatched two men to ask him to come and see what he could do.

What were they hoping for? A crumb from the Master's table?

The Upper Room:

A place of grief:

So Peter was brought to that upstairs room:

Acts 9:39 NIV

Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

Luke uses the same word for this room that he uses for the room in which the disciples gathered after Jesus ascended back to His Father in Heaven. It was presumably in this same room that the Holy Spirit came upon them, empowering them for their work as witnesses and ambassadors to King Jesus. At that moment Jesus' disciples found themselves at a place where Heaven and Earth came together.

But *this upper room* has become a place of grief and death. The woman so crucial to the community of Christians in Joppa lay dead and prepared for burial. All her friends could do was cry. When Peter arrived all they could do was reminisce about the past.

A place of prayer:

Peter ushered them all from the room and got to work:

Acts 9:40a NIV

Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed.

His mission: to turn a place of grief into a place of life. He could remember walking into the room of a 12 year old girl who had died in his home town of Capernaum. He could still hear the shrill cries of the mourners, their ridicule when Jesus told them that she was only asleep. Then he had cleared the room of all but her parents and 3 disciples. A few moments later, she was alive and in her parents' arms!

Peter had no power over death. But he knew the One who did, and so he prayed. He prayed that this upper room would become a place where Heaven and Earth came together -- a place where Death would meet Life. A place where a God would serve a foretaste -- an appetizer, if you will -- of The Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

New Life!

A place of life:

Peter spoke to Dorcas by her Jewish name, Tabitha, with words virtually identical to those spoken by Jesus that day in Capernaum:

Acts 9:40b NIV

Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.

Once again, the King of Life awoke one of His subjects from the sleep of death.

Acts 9:41 NIV

He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive.

Isn't that a beautiful way to put it: "He presented her to them alive." They had presented her to him dead and ready for burial. But Jesus came in answer to Peter's prayer. The upper room that had become a place of grief and death became Holy Ground -- a sacred space in which Heaven and Earth came together. Life flooded into that space, driving Death out the window.

He presented her to them alive.

Appetizers of Heaven:

So what was it like for Dorcas' many friends to see her come down the stairs under her own power and very much alive? Imagine the shock, the joy, the wonder. There right in front of them was a foretaste -- an appetizer -- of God's great promise that Death itself would one day be banished forever.

This miracle was a sign pointing to something far, far greater: the resurrection of us all on the day that Jesus the King returns in all of His glory and power:

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 The Message

And then this: We can tell you with complete confidence-- we have the Master's word on it-- that when the Master comes again to get us, those of us who are still alive will not get a jump on the dead and leave them behind. In actual fact, they'll be ahead of us.

The Master himself will give the command. Archangel thunder! God's trumpet blast! He'll come down from heaven and the dead in Christ will rise-- they'll go first. Then the rest of us who are still alive at the time will be caught up with them into the clouds to meet the Master. Oh, we'll be walking on air!

And then there will be one huge family reunion with the Master. So reassure one another with these words.

One day the whole Earth will become the Upper Room -- the sacred space where God rules as King. On that day Death will be no more:

Revelation 21:3-4 The Message

I heard a voice thunder from the Throne:"Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They're his people, he's their God. He'll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good-- tears gone, crying gone, pain gone-- all the first order of things gone."

When Jesus raised the little girl from the dead, or called Lazarus out of his grave, He was giving us all a sneak preview of the main event. Something to whet our appetites. Something to assure us that it's well worth waiting for the main course!

Appetizers.

New Life!

God is calling you and me to be ambassadors of King Jesus. We are ambassadors in enemy territory -- a world still under Death's sway. Our mission: to dare to walk into places of grief and despair, brokenness and ruin, so that God can serve a foretaste of Heaven.

We are called to close the door, get down on our knees, and invite King Jesus to come and turn a dark place into an Upper Room where Heaven and Earth come together.

We do not write the menu. We do not determine which appetizer the King will serve on any given day or in any given situation. But we know that whatever comes out of His kitchen will create a hunger for that great banquet that God has prepared for us: The Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

One day the last of the appetizers will have been served. Then the whole world will hear the great God of Heaven issue the invitation we've all been waiting for. We'll find ourselves in God's banquet hall, singing a brand new song:

Revelation 19:6b-9 The Message

Hallelujah!

The Master reigns,

our God, the Sovereign- Strong!

Let us celebrate, let us rejoice,

let us give him the glory!

The Marriage of the Lamb has come;

his Wife has made herself ready.

She was given a bridal gown

of bright and shining linen.

The linen is the righteousness of the saints.

Hors-d oeuvres, anyone?