

"Got Any Grapes?"

Psalm 4; I John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

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Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Milford, Connecticut

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A duck walks into a bar (Is the Methodist minister telling a bar joke? Oh yes he is!) and says to the bartender *"Got any grapes?"* The bartender gives him a dirty look and says, *"Of course not! This is a bar."* The duck walks out.

A half hour later the same duck walks into the same bar and says to the same bartender *"Got any grapes?"* *"You, again?"* sneers the bartender. *"I told you 'no.' We're a bar, not a grocery store. No, get out!"* The duck leaves.

30 minutes later, same exchange: The duck walks into the bar, and asks *"Got any grapes?"* By now the bartender is really annoyed and just about shouts *"I told you, no grapes! I've got a business to run here, not deal with the likes of you. Get out! And if you come in here again with that stupid question, I'm going to nail your big flappy duck bill to the bar!"*

The duck exits, only to return five minutes later and ask *"Got any nails?"* *"No!"* yells the bartender. *"Got any grapes?"*

"Have you anything here to eat?" asks the resurrected Jesus to his astonished, bewildered and doubting disciples. By their response to Jesus' presence and his greeting of peace, the disciples shout in silent voices *"Of course not! Don't you know you're not supposed to be here? Don't you know you're dead? This is a place of death, not life."*

This encounter of the resurrected Christ with the huddled disciples is the third of Luke's resurrection stories on this third Sunday of Easter. It follows Luke's Easter Day proclamation of the empty tomb and the appearance of the resurrected Christ to Clopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus. It

underscores our proclamation that Easter is a season and not just a day; and that to live as an Easter people is to see in each moment the possibility of resurrection, of new and different beginnings, of new life.

Let's be honest: for some folks the glow of Easter has faded to "business as usual." The party's over, the trumpet and drums and bells and lilies are gone; and life is resumed. Too often, Church, we live our lives as if we were ServicePro, the clean-up company whose slogan is "*Like it never even happened.*"

This week we conclude our study of the Rev. Michael Slaughter's book Made for a Miracle and – spoiler alert for those students who haven't read the chapter yet – he retells the story from John's Gospel of the man who was an invalid for 38 years, stuck by the side of the pool at Bethesda. Slaughter challenges those of us for whom Easter has not made a difference:

The man had become comfortable in his discomfort, accustomed to his current circumstance, a firm believer in his own excuses. His 'day job' had become lying by the pool week after week, year after year, changing nothing, making excuses, eventually expecting nothing. He was stuck. (1)

The disciples were stuck: stuck in their grief, stuck in their terror at this apparition called "Jesus" whom they thought was a ghost, stuck in their doubt and their inability to understand all that Jesus had taught them about what was to happen to him but that he would rise from the dead on the third day and – wait for it – "*that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*"

(1) Made for a Miracle, Slaughter, Michael, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2017, p. 121.

Like the duck in the bar story, this resurrected Jesus, this Easter Jesus can be annoying. *“Proclaim forgiveness of sins to all nations.” “Forgive your enemies and pray for those who spitefully use you.” “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”* Very, very annoying. I know.

On Easter Day my family occupied most of a pew at the 10 a.m. worship, a little United Nations enclave of European, African, Caribbean and Asian ancestry. Turns out if I’d been sitting with them, based on my Ancestry.com DNA report, we could add 11% Iberian peninsula (Spain and Portugal) and 1% Jewish. “Modern Family” has nothing on us.

Among the gathering was my former wife, Cindy, and her partner, JoAnne. They were there because I invited them. And I invited them because of this annoying Easter Jesus, who has kept after me these ten years like the hound of heaven he is, a decade of praying *“forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”* and trying to forgive but not really; a decade of trying to reconcile my righteous indignation at having been betrayed with the Jesus I follow who told Peter, who betrayed **him**, “Feed my sheep;” a decade of Easter services that made my sons choose between their father and their mother. And finally, with the clock ticking the seconds down, with time running out, with what may be my final Easter service as a pastor and certainly is my final Easter in this church as your pastor, Jesus got through to my shriveled spirit with that oft-intoned but too-seldom-practiced word, “forgive.”

There is nothing here of virtue. I wish I was able to do it sooner. It took the time and hard work it took, and confessing that is all I can offer for the delay. There is nothing here of virtue, but there is everything here of grace, and of responding to the call of the resurrected Christ, the Easter Christ, the triumphant Christ.

And that's the key word: act. In all of this, God calls us to act. "Got any grapes?" is a ridiculous question in a bar because grapes are not anything a bar will ever offer. "Have you anything here to eat?" on the other hand, provokes us because feeding body and soul is at the heart of Christian mission. "Have you anything here to eat?" reminds us that Jesus told the disciples on the hillside with the 5,000 "You give them something to eat" before Andrew brought the boy with five loaves and two fish to be multiplied into a miracle. "Have you anything here to eat?" reminds us that the resurrected Jesus told the almost-defeated Peter, "Feed my sheep." "Have you anything here to eat?" reminds us of Him who said "I AM the bread of life." "Have you anything here to eat?" reminds us of the depth and breadth and height of the love of the One who said, "This is my body, broken for you." And you. And you. And you. And you.

Because of that love, we act. We act in our interpersonal lives to embody the love and peace and forgiveness and grace of the One whom we follow. We act in our corporate life to be a church (small "c") in service to others. We act in mission as the Church (large "C"), extended with our United Methodist connection and our ecumenical relationships and our mission partners – locally, nationally and internationally – because being able to **believe** the truth that Christ is risen means **acting** as though he is. Maybe, just maybe, we sometimes **live** as though Easter never happened because we choose to **act** as if Easter happened.

But sometimes we do act as if Easter happened. A "30-something" businessman spoke to me this week. He has become active in his church – not this church – and is attending a Bible study where he is reconnecting and reinterpreting as an adult the faith he learned in his childhood. He shared that he sometimes makes business decisions that, on the face of it, are

like asking for grapes in a bar. Looking from the outside the decisions don't make business-sense and are sometimes viewed by his business colleagues as not good for his business.

He said to me *"I've made these decisions because they seemed like the right thing to do. But in re-studying the Bible I realize that I've made them because of my faith, because of what I believe about people and how people should be treated, and because of the example I see in Jesus."* There is he again: that annoying, provocative, life-engaging and life-changing Jesus.

So act as if you believe Christ is risen and you'll find that he is: in your heart and in your family and in your community and in your church. Act: and find that the resurrected Christ is acting through you. Act: and you'll find that what you do for the least of his brothers and sisters you do for the Living Christ.

"Have you anything here to eat?" We sure do, Risen Lord. "Got any grapes?" Surprisingly, amazingly, we have those, too: unexpected gifts of love and compassion for a weary world. The Lord is Risen! He is Risen, indeed! Amen.