“How the Sausage is Made”

Luke 24: 36-48

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Mark Patinkin is a writer I respect. Not because he has distinguished gray “writer hair” or because he has cranked out a quality newspaper column since 1979, or even because he was a finalist for a Pulitzer. My respect for Mark Patinkin is because he saved my relationship with my in-laws. We were having trouble communicating. No matter what they said I couldn’t seem to respond the right way. And then my sister-in-law gave me Mark Patinkin’s most important book: The Rhode Island Dictionary.

  

This masterpiece enables someone who says, “What did y’all want for dinner” to effectively communicate with people who say, “Hey Ma! Did ya remembah to sautee the gahlick and peppahs?”

This book should be core curriculum for anyone marrying “Northern.” It’s Rosetta Stone quality information. In the center of the book, under “J” Patinkin explains the term “Jeet jet?” This is a term you use when you approach a group of people, you’re hungry, and you’d like to dine with them. If Jesus had been from Rhode Island, these are the words he would have used as he spoke to the disciples. Rather than asking “Have you anything here to eat?” Jesus would simply have said, “Jeet jet?” [Did you eat yet?]

There is nothing more embodied, more fleshy, more carnal than eating. The risen Christ made it clear that he wasn’t an apparition, floating through the door as the projection of a disciples’ group dream. Jesus said, “Touch me and see” and he showed them his hands and feet. And when he saw they were still afraid he relied on what we recognize as a sacrament. He asked to break bread with them and they remembered that his very body was broken for them and his blood was shed for their forgiveness. Here he was, after the horror of his arrest in the garden, the march through the streets to Golgotha, after the crucifixion, and the somber walk carrying the body to the tomb. Here Jesus stood in front of them, real, fleshy, HUNGRY! He was someone they could touch. And they believed.

I have many friends whom I love and respect who are either atheist, which means they are sure there is no God, or agnostic, which means they can’t say for sure there is no God but they don’t believe. These folks put up with my religious ways, even though they are sure in their heart of hearts that my work, my faith, is really folly. It’s kinda silly in their minds. But because they respect me as a person, they claim me as a friend. And I claim them. And I cherish them and honor my friendship with them. They challenge me to think in new ways and I love a good, deep theological discussion.

And it is 2018. It’s been a long time since Jesus bodily showed up in that room where the disciples were gathered. There is no “touch and see” today with the risen Lord. Jesus himself isn’t in front of us, asking “Jeet jet?” And that can make it hard to believe.

There’s an old piece of wisdom: to enjoy a delicious piece of sausage, you don’t need to know every detail about how it was made. Ingredients? Nah. Process? Not important. Just take a bite and savor it!

If you’re the kind of person that needs proof, that wants to know how the sausage is made, it makes sense that believing in God, in the risen Christ, is a challenge. This is a post-modern world, and we are living after the Age of Reason, so nowadays people expect scientific proof before they believe anything. People want to understand each step in the process, in other words, they don’t want to just enjoy the finished product, they want to know HOW THE SAUSAGE IS MADE.

In the late 1980s I was in Las Vegas with my husband “for business.” We figured out early the best way to enjoy Vegas is to invite a bevy of friends along, and that’s how I ended up sitting at a table with Oldie, Rapps, Gypsie and a dozen other friends at magician David Copperfield’s show at Caesar’s Palace. For those who don’t know who David Copperfield is, imagine David Blaine in the 80s. He was one of the top entertainers in the world and it wasn’t just because of his 80’s hair.



Our table was near the stage. And after Copperfield had made a bird appear out of thin air and sawed a woman in half, he made eye contact with me. With me! Not Oldie or Rapps or Gypsie, but me! He invited me up on stage. I was so honored, and frankly I was also quite relieved he had already completed the sawing-a-woman-in-half trick. He went twirling to one end of the stage and I was escorted to the other. I sat on a high barstool and was given paper, a pen, and a champagne glass by his very attractive assistant (who also seemed quite relieved he had already completed the sawing-a-woman-in-half trick.) In a hushed staged whisper, Copperfield coyly said, “Write down your phone number and place it in the champagne glass.” So I did. And Copperfield twirled over to me, lit a match, and dropped it dramatically into the champagne glass.

My phone number, and my dreams of him calling me after the show, went up in flames.

And then, looking deeply into my eyes, connecting with my very soul, Copperfield said, “Your number is coming to me.” And he wrote down a phone number. And he showed it to me. And . . . YES! It was the right number! It was amazing! I believed!

When I got back to the table, we all speculated. How did he do it? Rapps thought there a camera way above the barstool watching me write. Oldie guessed a handwriting expert analyzed the way I moved my pen. Gypsy thought Copperfield already knew my name and had looked up my published number in the phone book. How did he do it? How was the sausage made?

We didn’t figure out how he did the trick. But I figured out something even more important. It didn’t matter how he did the trick. I didn’t need to know how the sausage was made. There are some things in this world that we can believe and embrace for the sheer joy of it. The pleasure we get from a magic trick is the sense of amazement that it brings into our lives.

I’m not advocating becoming a sucker for someone with a nefarious agenda. I think scripture is pushing us to ask ourselves some questions, just as the disciples questioned when Jesus appeared to them. Questions like *Am I being fooled by embracing this belief? Can putting my faith in this harm me in some way? Do I lose my powers of intellect and reason if I stop trying to understand it and just enjoy what it brings in to my life?*

In verse 38 Jesus asks: *“Why are you frightened and why do doubts arise in your heart?”* Fear and doubt often go hand in hand. For the disciples, they feared not only appearing foolish but losing their lives for following the wrong leader. In modern America, where we are free to follow Christ without risking the loss of life, our biggest fear in believing is appearing foolish to others or even being fooled ourselves. Of course a skeptic is going to doubt!

*“Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”*

While some of us learned in high school that protons and neutrons are the smallest imaginable particles, scientists postulated about even smaller particles—quarks-- in 1964. The sixth type of quarks was identified in 1995. Did quarks exist before scientists dreamed of them, say in 1960? Yes. Were there quarks in the year 33 A.D.? Yes. Could their existence be proven then? No.

Sometimes it takes a leap of faith, a suspension of the need for proof, an imagining of something beyond our comprehension to get to that sense of amazement. For scientists, a willingness to be wrong or risk embarrassment is actually an essential element for success.

I’m not discouraging us from asking questions. Questions are good! Ask away! Enter into discussion and search for answers. **AND** be okay without an absolute, black or white, right or wrong answer.

In our home, as our children got older we often repeated a Christmas saying: “If you believe, you will receive.” It works in the Andrade house. Probably because it’s Biblically based.

In today’s gospel we read that while the disciples were joyful but still disbelieving and wondering, Jesus ate a piece of fish and it became clear he was real. And it was then that the disciples received. Jesus *“opened their minds to understand the scriptures.”* By committing themselves, their minds and their hearts, to believing in the resurrected Christ, they unlocked a capacity for understanding that was previously unknown to them.

Is there a capacity for understanding that you and I have not yet tapped? Is there a door to comprehension just ajar, waiting to open wide when we finally say, “Yes, I do believe?” Saint Augustine said, “I believe *that I might understand*.” In today’s Call to Worship we shared many wise words about stepping out on faith.

The power of Jesus Christ does not lie in our ability to prove how Jesus lived, died, and was raised for us. The power of Jesus Christ lies in what his life, death and resurrection DOES for us and for this world. Because right here and now, if we do believe, we do receive.

I learned many years ago from my good friend David Copperfield that there can be joy found in things I cannot explain. Magic and wonder are my friends. If I spend all my energy on “figuring it out” I lose the wonder of the experience. Believing in the unprovable expands my understanding of the world. It makes what seems impossible a reality. If I will but give up my ego-centered need to read the fine print and simply accept the joy, the grace, the new life being offered to me, my world expands. Surely that’s what it means to have heaven on earth. To walk around amazed. Empowered. Ready for rich relationships. Courageous in answering a call to action.

We may not have bodily proof of the resurrection, but all around us is evidence of the Good News of Jesus Christ in this world. Ethereal words like faith and belief become grounded and real and embodied when we live them out, when we “connect faith with everyday life.” An open heart and a sincere desire to love God and love our neighbors as we love ourselves lead to beautiful, wondrous things.

Amazing acts. Acts that would make even the mighty David Copperfield forget his need to know how the sausage is made.

It is wondrous to wonder.

Amen.