

KNOWN IN THE BREAKING

1 Peter 1:13-23
Luke 24:13-35

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April 6, 2008

TEXT; Luke 24:35 “Then they told what had happened to them on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

PURPOSE: To invite us to desire the opening of our eyes which allows us to recognize the risen Christ present with us not only in sacred meal but in the routines of living.

Here before us is a table set with common stuff that also is holy mystery. It is bread that our deacons bought and prepared; juice from the juice aisle of the grocery store, set out in disposable plastic cups. It is also what the communion liturgy I used at the beginning of my ministry said it was: “the innermost sanctuary of the whole Christian worship.” That old liturgy continued in this way: “we have to do here not with signs merely, but with the reality those signs represent. The sacrament of may therefore be approached by those who are of a devout, repentant, and believing mind.” I remember saying those words and wondering, do I qualify? Do I have a right to approach this table, let alone to serve others from it?

The service we use these days takes a more comfortable approach, beginning with an invitation inspired by the story we just heard from Luke’s Gospel: “Luke the evangelist wrote of our risen Savior that when he was at table with two disciples, he took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them and their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. In company with them, and with all believers in every time, we come to this table to know him in the breaking of the bread.”

What is going on in this little ritual we share once a month? Are we entering the innermost sanctuary, the holy of holies, of our faith? Or are we simply sharing a meal with Jesus and his friends? Or are we entering into a mystery that we are also taking into ourselves? Or are we, as we have been throughout Lent and now the season of Easter, exploring what it is for us to meet Christ?

The story tells of a meeting that took place on the evening of the first Easter. The women may have gone to the tomb early in the morning with a mix of grief and trust. The two disciples in this story seem to be totally dejected. “But we had hoped,” they said to the stranger walking with them, “that he was the one to redeem Israel.” We thought he was the one, but now he’s gone. Dead and done for. They had heard about the empty tomb, and the angel’s announcement that Jesus was alive, but that news had not yet kindled resurrection faith. Jesus joined them for their walk

home, but there on the road, they were not able to know who he was. He heard their version of the events of the past few days, and more: he heard them. He heard the aching of their souls, he heard their inability to make the connection between the testimony of the old prophets and the drama of his dying. So as they walked, he launched into a massive review of scripture, picking up on every reference that pointed to a Messiah who had to suffer in order to save. Even so, even though the one whom John called the Word made flesh was breaking the word of scripture open to these two disciples, they still did not recognize their teacher on the road as Jesus, crucified and risen.

You could say that's pretty amazing. You have someone walking with you who, by all other accounts, looks pretty much the same as he did before he was crucified. And this person shares his awesome grasp of scripture which connects the dots between the old record and the current events. It's hard to believe that two people who were already believers failed to recognize their fellow traveler as their risen Lord. Hard to believe except that Luke let them off the hook by noting that "their eyes were kept from recognizing him." Discovering the risen Christ is not accomplished by honing our faculties. He is *revealed* to us. The revelation is his work, not ours, and it is given in his time. Not to say that digging into the scriptures doesn't prepare us for his revealing. Surely it does. But he is made known to us by grace through faith, not by conjuring or figuring him out.

So the threesome came to the village of Emmaus, the destination of the two of them. Jesus, Luke wrote, "walked ahead as if he were going on." Now something was up to the two disciples. Jesus was not going to force himself on them. But they made the move, an act of simply hospitality captured in the old hymn: "Abide with me, fast falls the eventide; the darkness deepens, Lord with me abide." He accepted their invitation, and they set out a simple supper. There, gathered around their table, the guest became host. "He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them." *Then*, Luke wrote, then in that act which we will recreate in a few minutes, "their eyes were opened and they recognized him." In the wake of that recognizing, the two disciples left their home and headed back to Jerusalem to share their encounter with other disciples.

Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. No doubt, the meal they shared foreshadowed the communion we are about to share— the description, "took, blessed, broke, and gave" is the core language of our ritual. But

also, it was a simple meal, unplanned, offered to a stranger as a gesture of hospitality. It was putting food out when your teenager's friends descend on your house. It was eating with a stranger in an airport food court when your flights are delayed. It was a volunteer sharing a tray of cookies with guests in our homeless shelter. It was eye contact that reveals common humanity between one of our food pantry volunteers and a client, who the pantry director, Grace, insists are not clients. "They're family."

The Easter evening version of the Lord's supper was a no-frills event, given no meaning apart from the hospitality offered and the recognition received. For those two unawakened disciples, meeting Jesus didn't require anything more than simple hospitality and genuine presence. I believe Jesus offers the same opportunity to us. His revealing of himself doesn't need putting out the fancy china; but it does look for places of real welcome and honest connection. Here at this church's communion table, we come to know our Lord in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. But our table urges us not to limit our encounters with him only to this breaking of bread, only to this sharing of cup. The basement potluck, the coffee and cookie time that follows worship, the refreshments we serve after a funeral, even the lunch we share with a friend, each have the capability of becoming sacramental, an opportunity to deal "not with signs merely, but with the reality these signs represent" – the reality of people being fully present to each other, which invites the presence of the Risen One.

I belong to a clergy group which gathers monthly for mutual support, for study of scripture, and for sharing the sacrament of Holy Communion. Every month our way of sharing communion is different, because a different pastor hosts the meal each time we come together. But there is a regular participant in our group who always says the same thing when we pass the bread. "Remember," he says, "bread cannot be shared unless it has been broken." His words link the communion bread to the body of Christ, Christ who said of the bread at the last supper, "this is my body, which is broken for you." His body, his self, his life, is shared with us out of being broken on the cross.

Christ, indeed, continues to be known to us in the breaking, not only the breaking of bread, but as we partake of the brokenness of our world. When we enter into another person's breaking heart, broken because of loss or tragedy or failure, there in that broken place, there is room to know Christ, who draws all human heartbreak into his own broken heart. When we come close to the unrelenting pain of

people who are unloved and unlovely- with people who have made a mess of their lives, people who are difficult to be with, people whose disorders frustrate our ability to keep caring for them, in the stress of those relationships, there is room to know Christ, who did not abandon those who were shunned and excommunicated. When we stay close to the overwhelming crisis of people far away, to Iraqis fearing for their lives, to refugees from Darfur, to distant friends in Zimbabwe longing for sanity in their land, to people still displaced

two and a half years after Katrina devastated our own Gulf Coast, in our reaching out, in our feeble attempts to understand and to help, there is room to know Christ, who makes his redeeming presence most known in the most broken places of our world. And then, right inside our own selves, as we come to terms with how we are broken, how we have been harmed and have harmed, how we have exploited the good earth for the sake of our own indulgent lifestyles, how we added to the walls that divide God's children by our own prejudice and contempt for those who are different from us, we discover, in our inner confrontation, room to know Christ, who told us, as he lifted the cup, that it was his blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. The Psalmist affirmed, in a powerful prayer, that "the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Psalm 51:17)

Jesus Christ is known in the breaking. In the breaking of the bread here in worship as we share this holy mystery which sits us down in the center of our faith. In the pouring of coffee and the sharing of sweets as we offer graced hospitality to each other and allow ourselves to really meet. In the offering of food from our pantry tomorrow morning insofar as that sharing honors the brokenness that makes a food pantry necessary, and lets love break the wall that divides "have's" from "have not's." In the solidarity we cultivate with our brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe which has so many of us emotionally caught up in the promise and peril of their elections. And most of all, and spilling over into every other breaking where Christ may be known, in our own broken hearts, our own souls yearning for newness.

Come to the table. Come to the place where bread is taken, blessed, broken, given, to the place where life is taken, blessed, broken, given. Trust that Christ will reveal himself to you in the breaking. And discover in that revealing the resurrection power that even now is mending all that has been broken restoring health and wholeness to a world that has come apart, and healing us, body and soul, as we more deeply share the mystery of his life made visible in the broken bread and the lifted cup.