

Known in the Breaking of the Bread
April 6th, 2008
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Luke 24:13-35

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' ¹⁹ He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' ²⁵ Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The Gospel of Luke includes this beautiful and fascinating story that takes place on the evening following Easter morning. Jesus' followers had gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover with great hopes for the change that they felt in the air. Jesus had been inspiring and challenging them, they had watched him perform miracles and heal, they had seen him challenge authorities, and heard him speak of the coming Kingdom of God.

They had been there when he gave them the great commandment, to love one another, just as God loved them. And they had been there when he was betrayed, when he was arrested, when he was condemned and when he was killed.

As they left Jerusalem to return to their homes I can't even begin to imagine how they must have felt. I would guess they were disappointed to say the least, likely heartbroken and dejected. And as two of Christ's followers walked along, they were discussing the things that had happened in the preceding days. As they walked along, consumed by their disappointment by their loss, by their grief, the risen Christ came and journeyed with them.

This story, the story of the walk to Emmaus, is one of my favorite stories in the entire Bible. Every time I read it I find a new level of meaning in the text; I hear it speaking to me in a new and fresh way. There are a lot of things that I have come to love about this story over the years, but this morning I want to focus on four themes that seem particularly pertinent on this second Sunday after Easter.

Particularly, I love the way that Christ joins these disciples and walks with them, I love the way that Christ teaches them about the scriptures and about God, I love the way that these two disciples extend hospitality to a stranger and become aware of Christ's presence in the breaking of the bread, and I love the way these two disciples so passionately live out their faith after their encounter with the risen Christ.

Captured in all four of these pieces of the story is the reality that in this story we find both the promise of Christ for us and the call of Christ on our lives. For the last couple of weeks we have sung songs about the triumph of resurrection, we have celebrated Easter and what the risen Christ means in our lives. Today, as we continue our

celebration of Easter, as it begins to feel more and more like spring outside as the days lengthen and the sun brightens creation, we are reminded of Christ's promise to walk with us and we are reminded of the opportunities that we have and the call that is on our lives to respond with hope and with joy.

The first of these four pieces of the story that I want to look at this morning is the fact that as these disciples are on their return journey home, Jesus comes and walks with them, but they don't even realize it. Luke tells us that they are busy talking about the things that happened in Jerusalem in those days. They are so consumed by their own stuff, that they aren't even able to see the risen Christ in their midst.

How much are we like this today? Just two weeks ago we celebrated Easter, we have an advantage that these two disciples did not, we know how the story ends, that Christ is risen, but nonetheless, we often let ourselves get bogged down by the stuff of the world.

It's easy to do isn't it? We continue to hear things on the news about the mortgage crisis, foreclosures are at an all time high, people are losing their homes, and many are living in fear that this could happen to them. At the same time as homes are losing values and people are losing homes, the stock market continues to be in turmoil as well. People are seeing their retirement savings dwindle, and the dates that they thought they might be able to retire get pushed back further and further as they realize they'll need to continue working to pay their bills. And outside of these economic factors, there is much that causes anxiety in our lives as well, strained relationships, issues of self identity and worth, worries about safety for our future and security for our loved ones cause people much anxiety. In the midst of our worry we can quickly forget the good news that the risen Christ comes to journey with us.

Secondly, as the risen Christ comes and journeys with these disciples they converse with one another, exchanging their stories and sharing with one another. Jesus asks what they're speaking about and they share the story of all that had happened in Jerusalem in the last days. Again, they don't recognize Jesus and are shocked that he would have not heard of what had happened, so they tell him the story in its entirety. After they've shared this story with Jesus, he takes time to share with them, to teach them about the work of God in the world beginning with Moses and working through all of the prophets.

In the midst of the stuff of life, when they are so consumed with their own worries and disappointments, Jesus comes and teaches, instructing them about God's work in the world. Here we see both a gift that is offered as well as something that is required of us in response. We must be willing to journey with others and with Christ, to ask questions, to dialogue if we're going to ever fully pull ourselves out of our own focus on our own stuff and be able to look out into the greater world around us.

The best way to do this, to engage with others and with God in the process, is to get involved. Come to the women's or the men's Bible Studies, come out on Wednesday nights to participate in Steve's Wrestling with God class these next few weeks, come out and get involved with youth group (either as a youth or as an adult sponsor) ask questions, gather with friends, seek to find the ways that God is at work in and around you.

The third piece of this story that is so significant is the hospitality that is extended by these two travelers. As they journey along, visiting with Jesus, they near their home as the day draws to a close. It appears as if Jesus plans to continue on down the road, but

they invite him in, invite him to join them for a meal. And the text tells us that as they dined with Jesus they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. As Jesus had gathered with his followers just a few nights before this encounter, on the night that he was arrested, he would have broken bread with them. They would have remembered God's activity in the lives of the Israelites and would have commemorated it through breaking bread together. When Jesus broke bread it triggered something familiar within these two and they suddenly realized that Jesus was with them.

Today we will celebrate communion together, we will remember Christ's act of serving communion and have the opportunity ourselves to encounter Christ in the breaking of the bread. As we do so it is also a remembrance of God liberating the slaves out of Egypt, it is a remembrance of God providing manna for the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness, it is an opportunity for us to remember the life and teaching of Jesus, to remember the healing he performed, the way in which he called people in authority to accountability, and the forgiveness that he offered to us all.

But it is not only in the act of communion that we have the opportunity to know and to encounter Christ in the breaking of the bread. Whenever we share meals with one another, we have the opportunity to better come to know and understand the presence of Christ in the world. That's part of what's so great about WVE, the opportunity to break bread and to share a meal with people from throughout the church family. Take these opportunities, or opportunities to connect with friends who are going through a hard time, or a person who is new to your neighborhood or the community. To invite others to share a meal is a radical step, it's not something that we do much as a culture, but it is a great

opportunity for us to get to know others and to know Christ through the presence in the breaking of the bread.

After walking with and talking with Jesus, after sharing a meal with him and recognizing who he was in the breaking of the bread, the final piece of this story that is so moving is how these two respond. We are told that Cleopas and the other disciple, who most commentators presume was his wife, run to tell the others about the experience that they have had. They immediately commit themselves to telling others the good news that Jesus is in fact risen from the dead and that the risen Christ walks with them, talks with them, teaches them, and breaks bread with them. This is the life of commitment that we are called to have in response to our encounter with the risen Christ.

This last Friday was the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. As I drove home from running errands I heard some words from one of Dr. Kings sermons, words that for me summarize beautifully what it means to live this life committed to sharing the love of the risen Christ.

Hear these words, spoken from the pulpit at Ebenezer Baptist church, just two months before King was assassinated:

I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind.

And that's all I want to say.

If I can help somebody as I pass along,

If I can cheer somebody with a word or song,

If I can show somebody he's traveling wrong,

Then my living will not be in vain.

If I can do my duty as a Christian ought,

If I can bring salvation to a world once wrought,

If I can spread the message as the master taught,

Then my living will not be in vain.

Yes, Jesus, I want to be on your right or your left side, not for any selfish reason. I want to be on your right or your left side, not in terms of some political kingdom

or ambition. But I just want to be there in love and in justice and in truth and in commitment to others, so that we can make of this old world a new world.

The story of Jesus' encounter with his followers on the road to Emmaus has much to teach us about what it means to follow Jesus in these days following Easter. When we feel burdened by the world around us, we can take comfort in the good news of the risen Christ who comes to journey with us. When we are looking for guidance and direction, struggling with understanding, we can trust the presence of Christ to guide us and teach us about the scriptures and God's work in our lives. Through the celebration of communion as well as the sharing of meals with others, we can know God in Christ through the breaking of the bread. And as we encounter the risen Christ, while journeying through life, while studying and living in community, through the breaking of the bread, we are called to live lives of commitment to share the good news of God's love and God's hope for justice with the entire world.