

In the Breaking of Bread

communion meditation

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Luke 24:13-35

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Have you had an opportunity to sit down and look through last week's *Ekklesia*? I hope you have been able to do that or at least soon will be able to because the pictures Connor, Marjorie and Michelle shared with us of Easter morning are priceless. At their request, Mark and Libby, Betty Galloway's children, are on our email distribution list. Our newsletter provides a way for them to keep up with people who have meant a lot to them and who meant a lot to their mother. From time to time, they respond to something they have seen or read. Libby responded yesterday saying how much she had enjoyed the "wonderful shots of loved ones gathering on Easter morning!" As I looked through the pictures, I could not help but agree. The happy faces I saw there, the sheer enjoyment reflected there of the joy and meaning found in life-long friendships was obvious. It reminded me, frankly, of something of what we experience when we gather at this table. It is one of the most meaningful things we do, for this moment is more than a reflection on events long past. It is a reminder of the love that holds us here. It is a reminder, yes, of God's love in Christ; but it is also a reminder of the love that binds us to one another in Christ's church. It is a celebration of the grace we have met in Christ and the grace we have met in one another.

Hold that thought, if you will, as we reflect back on our scripture passage this morning. Too often we read the Bible as if it is nothing more than a script followed by unthinking, unfeeling actors playing a part. Try looking at our story this morning and the stories shared about Jesus throughout the Gospels as something more on the order of snapshots in time—loving and sometimes very painful reflections upon time spent in Jesus' presence and the surprising discoveries that have been made there.

We join the disciples this morning in a time of heavy grief. The heart-wrenching events of the past week are weighing down upon them. The horrors of the cross, the shouts of the mob, the fear that overtook them as events unfolded—all are resounding in their every thought. If they have slept at all, their sleep has been wracked with nightmares. Their faces, Luke says, are drawn with pain and their hope past tense. "We *had hoped*," Cleopas tells the stranger who comes upon them, "that he was the one to redeem Israel."

The crucifixion, you will remember, was immediately followed by Sabbath. And now it is, Luke says, "the first day of the week," the first opportunity after the lifting of Sabbath restrictions for the women to return to the tomb, the first opportunity for disciples to begin moving away from Jerusalem. Perhaps the two making their way along the road to Emmaus are merely returning home. Or perhaps they are turning their backs, not simply upon Jerusalem, but upon all of the dreams that have sustained them in their walk with Jesus. Perhaps they are simply withdrawing from painful reminders that meet them on every corner in the city; or perhaps they are fearful of reprisals that might be taken against those who had accompanied Jesus. We don't know.

We also don't know whether this was, to use Marcus Borg's phrase, a video cam type of moment—a moment that any observer could have seen or taped—or whether it was a moment painted in retrospect to recapture something of what transpired. Perhaps what we have here is a parable crafted by Luke to beam a powerful message to Christ's church. Even if the story was an actual event that transpired exactly as described, it was a moment chosen from many moments. Why did Luke choose it? What message is he trying to pass on to us?

Luke is writing to a generation of Christians removed from the events of Jesus' ministry by 40 or more years. In all likelihood, none of them ever saw Jesus with their own eyes. Yet, Luke wants to say to them, their faith is more than secondhand. The disciples, Luke points out, came to recognize the risen Christ in his interpretation of scripture ("were not our hearts burning within us . . . while he was opening the scriptures to us?" they would later recall) and when he "took, blessed and broke" the bread as he had done at the Last Supper (22:19). Luke, it is true, is writing to say that Jesus is alive; but he is saying more than that. Pointing to the two primary elements of worship in the early church—the interpretation of scriptures and the Eucharist—Luke is writing to affirm Christ's ongoing presence in the here and now. Jesus is the living Lord we meet in scripture and the very present Lord who is revealed in the breaking of bread. As Fred Craddock puts it, Jesus' "presence at the table, makes all believers first-generation Christians and every meeting place Emmaus" [*Interpretation: Luke*, 287]. Living faith, you see, is not about checking off all the right doctrines concerning what we must believe. Living faith is about

immersing our lives in the sustaining presence of the Christ who comes among us.

Coming to an awareness that the stranger they had encountered on the road and with whom they had sat at table was Jesus, the disciples immediately returned to Jerusalem and shared “how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (24:35). It was an experience with which early Christians could identify as weekly they gathered around the table, and it is an experience with which we can also identify as time after time we gather to rehearse his life and remember his death.

So come now to the Table. Come, knowing that this moment is more than a reflection on events long past. Invited by Christ and held here by his love and the love of those with whom we gather, come in celebration of the grace that has found us.

Lord Jesus, stay with us; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen. “Collect for the Presence of Christ,” *Episcopal Book of Common Prayer*, 70