

EMMAUS AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Jesus took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them and their eyes were opened and they recognized Him. Luke 24:30-31

Today we move to another narrative from Easter Sunday. We do not always think of the story of the stranger joining travelers on the road to Emmaus as being an Easter Story. We never read this passage on Easter Sunday. Yet this passage from Luke's Gospel comes immediately after the account of the empty tomb. The narrative begins, **On that same day two of them were going to Emmaus.** That same day was Easter.

We traditionally celebrate the Lord's Supper the first Sunday of the month at our second service. So today I would like to share with you what this story of the Risen Lord teaches us about the meaning of the Lord's Supper. I believe that we learn three lessons concerning communion from this story.

First, we are taught that the Lord's Supper helps us understand the Scriptures. In our passage from Luke we find two of the disciples, we do not know their names, they may have been husband and wife, walking along the road to Emmaus. They are returning home following the crucifixion of Jesus. While walking they are approached by a stranger. This stranger provides some interesting conversation on the journey. He speaks with them about the events that had taken place in Jerusalem. He tells them that they should have known the Christ would have to die.

The stranger went on to interpret the whole meaning of the Old Testament for them. He pointed out how Jesus fulfilled the ancient prophecies. Yet the disciples still did not recognize who this stranger was. They could not fully understand him.

When the disciples reached their destination, it was late in the day, so they invited the stranger to spend the night with them. They sat down for a meal and the stranger broke bread, their eyes were opened and they recognized it was Jesus. It was then that they said to each other, **"Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us and while he opened to us the Scriptures?"**

The great New Testament scholar N.T. Wright tells us:

First, we break bread and drink wine together, telling the story of Jesus and his death, because Jesus knew that this set of actions would explain the meaning of his death in a way that nothing else--no theories, no clever ideas--could ever do.

Our worship service is one of Word and Sacrament. We have the reading of the Scriptures, which make up the service of the Word and we celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The Word and Sacrament go together. They fulfill each other. In a very real sense one does not have a full worship service without both Word and Sacrament.

The Sacrament without the Word has no content. The Word is the proclamation of the Good News. It tells us why we are gathered together in the name of Jesus. It is the retelling of the story of God's love for us. The Word tells us about Jesus.

The Word without the Sacrament can be meaningless. For it is the presence of the Risen Christ in the Lord's Supper that gives meaning and power to the Word. The two disciples had heard all that the stranger had said as they walked along the road and yet they did not fully understand. It was only when Jesus took the bread and blessed and broke it that they knew Jesus and truly understood the Scripture.

Without the real presence of Christ in Communion, Scripture becomes like e-mail or text from a person you have never met. People have begun what they have considered to be romances with people over the Internet. It may seem like a real romance, but it is only when two people are together that one can know if the relationship is real. In a similar way the Lord's Supper is our experience of the presence of Jesus. In the Eucharist Jesus is truly present. His presence gives meaning to the Scriptures, which are God's love letters to us.

A second truth that we learn in this passage is that the act of taking Communion means asking the Risen Christ to take charge in our life. The story as told by Luke is very interesting. When the disciples reached Emmaus, it appeared they had come to the end of their journey. It is probable they are at home. They invite Jesus to spend the night with them. Jesus accepts their offer. Next, we find them eating a meal at the end of the day. At this meal, Jesus takes the bread and blesses it and breaks it.

At first you might not think that anything out of the ordinary happened in the story. The disciples acted as good Jews in offering hospitality to a stranger. The words "and Jesus took bread" are very familiar to us. Yet these familiar words should be jolting to us in the context of this passage. Jesus was in the home of the disciples. They were the hosts. It was their honor, duty and privilege as the hosts to bless the bread. In this passage Jesus usurps the role of host. He takes control of the meal.

This role reversal is part of our experience of Jesus. Most of us want Christ to be a guest in our lives. Jesus is an attractive character. Just as he added something to the conversation with disciples on the road, so we know Jesus can add to our lives. We gladly invite him to be a part of our lives. We need a little religion. We want to be a little spiritual.

Jesus does not settle for this. He wants more. He wants to be the host and not just a guest. Jesus does not want to be on the fringes of our lives, he wants to be at the very center. He wants to have control.

Communion is the Lord's Supper. The Risen Christ is the host. It is his table we gather around. He is the one who calls us to it. It is his body and blood that we take for spiritual food. Each time we come to the table we recommit ourselves to the Lordship of Christ.

There are some Christian traditions that have what are called altar calls. People are encouraged to walk forward for prayer in which they commit or re-commit

themselves to Christ. In our tradition we have the Lord's Supper. When we come to the table we are renewing our commitment to Christ's role in our lives. In eating the bread and drinking the cup we again say yes to the Lord.

Finally, and most importantly this passage teaches us that Jesus is known in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Jesus took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them and their eyes were opened and they recognized Him. This happens to us as well. The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist means that you and I can know the presence of Jesus in the sacrament.

The Lord's Supper is more than recalling a meal that Jesus had with his disciples. When we eat the bread and drink the cup, in some way we cannot explain the Risen Christ reveals himself to us. Almost all Christians, the children of Constantinople, Rome, Wittenberg, Canterbury and Geneva believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. We may not agree on how it happens, but we all come to the table expecting to be fed by the presence of the Risen Christ.

Frederick Buechner is a novelist and a Presbyterian minister who has had a hot and cold relationship with the Church. I have shared with you before parts of an interview where he said:

I feel like a traitor when I talk about the Church. I always say some bad thing about it, and yet I owe the Church so much. I have had wonderful moments in churches. I remember a minister in Florida giving me communion and saying, "The Bread of Heaven, Freddy." He used my name, and I practically fell to the ground. Not only did I hear him calling me by my name and using the name my nearest family calls me, but also, I was hearing God Himself. And I thought, "Of course! If the Body and Blood is really for us, if it's really for me, then it's for Freddy that this is done."

Let us come to the table.

Let us recommit ourselves to Christ's rule in our lives.

Let us come to the table to experience the Risen Christ.

We may not know how this happens,

We may not be able to explain it in words,

But Jesus comes to us in a unique way.

Come to the table and discover the Risen Lord. As John Calvin tells us **"Christ is the only food of our soul and therefore our Heavenly Father invites us to Christ, that, refreshed by partaking of him, we may repeatedly gather strength until we shall have reached heavenly immortality."**

Or as even more poetically George Herbert reminds us; **Love is that liqueur sweet and most divine Which my God feels as blood; but I, as wine.**

Jesus took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them and their eyes were opened and they recognized Him.