

The Third Sunday of Easter + April 30, 2017

When Cleopas and the other disciple were walking the Emmaus Road they began their journey despondent. They were grieving and in despair because Jesus, their friend and teacher, was killed. Deep in grief over the loss of one they loved very much, they also felt their hopes were dashed. Suddenly they are joined by a “stranger.” It was Jesus risen but they did not recognize him.

He walks with them and on the way, they share the story of their grief and on the way Jesus unlocks the scriptures for them. He opens their minds to understand, linking the stories of God’s promises and activity to their story and to the story of Jesus. More than information, it became for them a kind of illumination and stirring of their hearts.

Finally, they ask him to be their guest at supper. Jesus accepts the invitation and sits at table with them and that is where they recognize him. Suddenly Jesus is recognized and made known when he breaks bread with them.

The Risen Jesus is made known to them in the breaking of the bread. There they recognized him. There Jesus was revealed. In the breaking of the bread, the Risen Jesus was made known.

Do you suppose their recognition was spurred by some familiarity? You know, that sense or feeling that this is where we’ve seen Jesus before and this is where God’s mercy has been made known. You know that experience when you’ve met someone for the first time but it doesn’t feel like the first time or you have a kind of de-ja-vu moment.

Jesus sat down with them and he took the bread, blessed, and broke it and gave it to them.

Maybe they remembered that other time when he took bread, blessed, broke it and gave the five loaves of bread along with the two fish to the 5,000 people. That remarkable occasion when no one was left out and all were fed the same. There were even leftovers.

Maybe they remembered all those meals that were a staple of Jesus’ ministry like the banquet hosted by Levi, the tax collector. Along with tax collectors who were not well regarded, Jesus ate there with others who were deemed “sinners” or outcast. Meals like that made the religious leaders grumble because Jesus was hanging out with those they considered to be the “wrong people,” but there the radical mercy of God was revealed.

Maybe they remembered the meals Jesus accepted at the home of Pharisees and other religious leaders. These meals, too, were filled with surprise and offence when Jesus would heal someone on the Sabbath or the time he allowed the woman to anoint him.

In all these instances, Jesus, by including anyone in his meal fellowship was revealing the mercy of God and breaking the notion that a sacred meal was reserved only for a few.

I wonder if the memory of those meals helped spark the recognition of his risen presence was known at the dinner table in Emmaus.

It was there in the meal where Jesus was known and recognized and revealed.

Here we are again. We gather as those who share in the apostles wonder and we return to that which is familiar. We return to what we know to be true for we have come to recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread and our recognition is sparked by a good degree of familiarity.

No wonder we pray, as we will pray a little later in the prayer of thanksgiving at the table, "Reveal yourself to us in the breaking of the bread."

This is something we ask Christ to do because we know that is where we may meet him. We pray it today not just once but twice. Right before the loaves are broken for distribution we will pray: "Risen Lord, reveal yourself to us in the breaking of the bread, as you once revealed yourself to the Apostles."

We share the joy and wonder of those travelers on the Emmaus road. We can count on Jesus to gather us, speak to us, feed us, and send us out. The ritual is familiar. Jesus is very dependable and very reliable.

We're here today because we know where to find good bread.

Yet, as familiar as the ritual is and as reliable as we know Jesus to be in showing up where he promises, there is, I venture to say, an element of surprise. Even as we are drawn into God's very life, there is still so much we do not know about God and so much that is yet to be discovered.

For when Jesus shows up, Jesus continues to do something new. We aren't the same people we were when we first entered the doors.

There is a kind of joyful urgency when we ask Jesus to be revealed in the breaking of the bread, for while familiar, we also have come to know that Jesus reveals himself in ways we seldom expect and in ways we've never known him.

As a friend of mine likes to say, "Be careful what you pray for." For in asking Jesus to reveal himself in the breaking of the bread, we are counting on Jesus to continue to enlighten us, illumine us, surprise us, and open our eyes.

Do you notice in the Emmaus story how Jesus, after breaking bread with the disciples suddenly vanishes. It is as if the apostles are invited into this never-ending journey of following Jesus, hungering for more, pining for more, hungry still for Jesus' risen presence. Jesus is saying, "This isn't all of me."

And even as we feast at the meal, we do not come away completely satiated. A sip of wine and a small morsel of bread does not make for full bellies. This is a hungry feast. There is a real sense where feasting with Jesus and one another leaves us hungry still, yearning for more, wanting more. We don't understand Jesus completely and we do not know Jesus fully. This is a foretaste of the feast to come.

We don't linger here and we don't remain here for too long.

That's because we rise from the table to go tell others and show others the mercy we know. And the one who is known to us in the breaking of the bread opens our eyes to recognize God's activity in the world around us.

At the Maundy Thursday service, we did something a little different. We held the foot washing after the meal or simultaneous with the meal. Once folks communed they were invited, if they chose, to go to a foot washing station to wash another's feet or have their feet washed. The grace of the meal overflowed into the grace of service. A picture of what the Christian life looks like.

The meal says there are no distinctions and hierarchies and the foot washing is an experience of humility and vulnerability. Jesus surprises us still with the WAY we live in the world

So, we will pray at the table today, "Reveal yourself to us in the breaking of the bread. Raise us up as the body of Christ of Christ for the world. Send us forth, burning with justice, peace, and love."

If we find ourselves hungry still and yearning for more, the grace is that we find ourselves bound to each other, sharing from the same loaf and drinking from the same cup, and bound to a hungry world. Bound to the hungry neighbor. From the hungry feast, we enter a hungry world.

When I was a kid, our family grace at supper time was the very familiar prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest and let these gifts to us be blest. Amen." Imagine my surprise when I came to PRLC to discover that this is the prayer we use before meals on Wednesday night before the meals at Bread for the Journey, and the prayer we use on Sunday night before the meal at the WAY.

It brought a huge smile to my face. But, there's more. The second part of the prayer that I never knew existed, "may every table everywhere receive from you a goodly share." That's the part you taught me and that's the part I now add to the prayer.

You see, when we ask Jesus to be our guest, he has this way of assuming the role of host. The guest becomes the host. And the Host directs the meal and so directs our lives – at Emmaus, at this table, at all our tables.

Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to hungry disciples.

Jesus, our host, shapes our lives, opens our eyes, re-members his body, reshapes our community, gives our ministries new life, re-forms our vocations and we are sent to be bread, broken for a hungry world.

Continue to reveal yourself to us, O Christ, in the breaking of the bread. Raise us up as your risen body in the world! Amen.