

Luke 24:13-35

Recognition

Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples.

If you have been around the church for some time, you have heard those words spoken in the context of taking communion. Each time the communion table is readied, the minister picks up the bread, and says these words... Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples. It is a remembrance of Jesus words and actions as he shared a meal with the disciples on the night before the terrible events of the crucifixion. It was a meal of instruction, remembrance, and community.

Communion, the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, all names for this same participation in tasting the bread and wine or juice, is a celebration of God's grace. It nourishes our faith. It sustains us. It is a gift. We call it a sacrament because, as Jesus shared the meal with his closest friends, we read in the Gospel of Luke the instructions to do this in remembrance of Jesus. (Luke 22:19)

The reason for sharing about the communion meal is because it is central to the story recounted in our Gospel reading today of the what is known as the Walk or Road to Emmaus. This story begins, "Now on that same day..." That same day being the day of resurrection. We may be two weeks out from Easter. Our lives feel like they have moved on from that Easter story and all the things we do to celebrate. The chocolate is either devoured or pretty much gone, the lilies may still have a bloom or two, the stores have moved on to getting the summer items out on the shelves in anticipation of the next season, but the Biblical story of Easter has not passed. On that same day...

Now on that same day two of them, two of those who had been in Jerusalem during all of the horror of the last few days, two followers of Jesus, were on their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Presumably where they lived. They were downcast, sad. Imagine yourself in their situation. The one that they had hoped would change everything had been sent to his death in the most excruciating and horrific way possible at the time. The Romans hung people on crosses in public places as a warning to anyone who might consider crossing them. Jesus had been a threat to the status quo, especially for the Jewish temple authorities, and for Rome, if they could quash any instability before it became a problem, they were going to do so.

Jesus had become a problem and so he was dealt with. With his death any hope for change, for a new beginning of power over oppression had been lost. Except there had been some news that the tomb was empty. In the Gospel of Luke, the women who had gone to the tomb did not find the body but had seen two men in dazzling white who told

them that Jesus had risen from the dead, recounting the words that Jesus had told followers about how he would die and then on the third day rise again.

The women ran back to the disciples to tell them everything and Peter took off to check it out, but as of yet it still seemed all too surreal, too unreal. The grief outweighed possibility and hope. The two men, in their walk to Emmaus even say, “We had hoped...We had hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel.”¹

But all hope was lost at this point. Heartbroken, defeated, and without hope, they head to Emmaus discussing all that had happened. Then they find themselves with a traveling companion. As the gospels were written after the fact, not as an in the moment play by play, we, the readers, are given the perspective by the writer of ones looking on the scene. We get to know what is going on but the actors in the scenario are oblivious. The person who has come alongside is Jesus, we know that, the writer knows that, but the two men are kept from recognition Jesus in that moment.

This has been a theme in Jesus’ resurrection appearances in the other gospels as well. For an unknown to us reason, Jesus is not at first recognizable to everyone he encounters. It is like something needs to happen for people to be able to open their hearts, minds, and eyes to who is with them. In this case it is the two men on the seven-mile walk. They cannot believe that someone doesn’t actually know what had gone on in Jerusalem over the last few days. So they share with him the story.

This guy seems to know a thing or two about scripture and says to them what they should have known already, or at least should have been able to see for themselves about what the prophets had declared and that it was necessary that the Messiah, whom they had believed Jesus to be, well that the Messiah had to suffer these things and then enter into his glory.

That might seem all well and good. Maybe they should have known, but I have yet to encounter anyone who in their grief has clarity about much of anything. It is always a process to get through grief. It is only over time that one can recall events or begins to put two and two together. One could hardly have expected anyone who had been close to Jesus to have their heads on straight. Grief does not work that way.

However, the two do what people did in that time where hospitality to a stranger was important. It wasn’t like people had much money or that there was a place wherever you needed it to bed down for the night. So, they invited the stranger to stay with them. And this is where things get really interesting. Usually if you are hosting someone for a meal you would prepare the meal and share it. In this case as, who we know to be Jesus, but

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they haven't figured that out yet, as he sits with them at the table, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

Where have we heard those words before? Where have they heard those words before? Those words bring everything into focus. It is in those words that they recognize Jesus and then he vanishes from their sight.

Now I am not here to explain away mysteries. I cannot tell you why they and others who experienced Jesus' resurrection body could not at first see that it was Jesus they were looking at, but each time something happens so that they do see Jesus.

In the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene did not recognize Jesus until he said her name. (John 20: 14-16). Also in John, Jesus comes to the disciples behind locked doors and it is like they do not know it is Jesus until he showed them his hands and his side. (John 20:20). And now, it is in the breaking of the bread that Jesus is revealed to them, that they recognize him.

What does seem to be a pattern is that Jesus is revealed to them when the relationship is reestablished. Something recognizable in the relationship opens up eyes, minds, and hearts. For Mary it was hearing her name spoken by one she cherished. For the disciples it was seeing the wounds that had been inflicted, knowing that they had let Jesus down and by doing so felt guilt for having left him, and for these two walking the road and inviting a stranger in, they recognize Jesus in the words and actions of that last meal together.

What is striking is that each vignette, each episode, reveals something about relationship with Jesus. Thinking on that, how is it that we can also recognize Jesus? Though some may have had the experience of seeing Jesus, I would hazard to guess that none of us here would claim to have had an experience quite like that of the followers of Christ in those days of resurrection appearances.

Still, that does not mean that we are bereft of any experience. With Jesus' death and resurrection, we are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit which becomes how we get to experience God's grace and Jesus' love today. It is the Holy Spirit that enables us to see Jesus and God at work in the world. And may I suggest, just like it was through relationship with Jesus that he was recognized by those who followed him in his living, that is how we also find Jesus now – in relationship. It is in relationship with one another that we experience the love, grace, compassion, and hope that is in Christ Jesus. It is in relationship to nature that we see God's glory.

And we know relationships take time. If you never look at nature, whether it is a cut flower that someone has given you, a butterfly, the budding leaves, a flowing stream, or a huge lake, or another snowflake, you will not appreciate the amazing grace, creativity, strength, and expanse of who God is. We are created beings along with all that God has created and we are meant to be connected to the earth.

We are also meant to be connected to each other. It is in being in relationship with each other that we can also see Jesus and God as we are created to be image bearers of God. And just as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit or in relationship with one another, we are created to be in relationship with one another. To withdraw from human relationships with all their complications, heartbreak, and struggle is to remove oneself from understanding how God works in the world. It is to remove ourselves from love, grace, compassion, and hope.

There is so much more to be said about this, thank goodness there are more Sundays and more ways to learn. For the moment, let's go back to the meal. Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples. Have you noticed that we get to know one another better when we sit and have a meal together. We built relationship with one another over a cup of tea or coffee or over food. We tend to linger longer and listen better when we take time. We get to know one another and we see each other more clearly. We begin to recognize the pain and see the joy.

Maybe it is not so astonishing that the men recognized Jesus over a meal. It will happen again before the Gospel of Luke closes, where Jesus stands among his disciples and they don't recognize him until he shows them his hands and feet and share a meal of broiled fish.

In part, it is because of this recognition of Jesus in a meal that we continue the practice of communion, of taking bread, blessing it, breaking it, and offering it to each other. It is in the communion meal that we see Jesus, in is in any meal that we are given the opportunity to see the image of God in one another. Over meals we build community.

If you do anything this week, maybe take the time to linger over a coffee, tea, drink, or meal, to build relationship with a loved one or someone that you do not well at all. Spend time in scripture, read a verse, say a prayer, get to know God, for it is also in relationship with God that we will recognize the image of God in one another and experience the grace of God in the world through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through each of us.

See each other, see Christ, see the Holy Spirit at work. Thanks be to God. Amen.