

Easter Worship Series: Know the Resurrected Christ As... Sermon Title: "Breaking Bread"

Luke 24:13-35; Psalm 116:1-14

Salem United Methodist Church; April 26, 2020

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Each Easter season we explore who the Risen Christ is and how we can live a resurrected life in Christ. During this time in which we are separated from our friends, family, and church community, we need the presence of the Risen Christ in our homes more than at any other time. How can we come to know the Resurrected Christ today?

One of the ways in which many are coping with being isolated in our homes is by taking walks. I saw a picture on Facebook of a dog looking forlorn as his master was attaching his leash. The caption read, "I can't wait for this stay-at-home order is lifted. This is our 10th walk for the day!" For us walking is a source of physical exercise that can also de-stress the mind and renew our souls. However, for many throughout the ages, walking was and remains in many parts of the world the most available mode of transportation. Our Gospel lesson begins with two people whose only mode of transportation was walking, walking seven miles to their hometown, Emmaus. Each year they made the annual Passover pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem. They looked forward to this annual trip in which they met up with family and friends. This year was to be a special one. Jesus who they knew as a prophet and teacher was coming. Their hope was that he would save their nation from the oppressive Roman rule. Instead, the Passover turned into a horrific nightmare. Jesus was cruelly executed by the Romans in collusion with the Temple leaders. Their hopes were dashed! And now there was a rumor floating around that he is alive. This seven-mile journey home was interminably long. They were grieving the loss of a hero. Their emotions were an entanglement of confusion, fear, anger, sadness, betrayal, and hopelessness. Then a stranger begins to walk alongside them, and asks to join their conversation. They are shocked that he doesn't know anything about the events of what happened in the past few days. The stranger asks one simple question, "What things?" and then intently listens to their disappointment and their grief. This stranger models for us the importance of walking along side someone who is grieving, ask a simple question, and then be willing to listen. When someone is hurting, when someone is experiencing a loss, when someone is entangled in a quagmire of emotions, the most compassionate thing to do is walk alongside, ask simple questions, and then listen. Listen without judgment. Listen without interruptions. Listen without thinking about how one should respond. Listening offers the one who is grieving an opportunity to disentangle all the emotions they are experiencing.

The stranger who walks with these two listens, and then responds to their grief by explaining from scriptures the reason for all that happened. When the two arrived home, they offered a meal and lodging to the stranger. Today we wouldn't think of opening our home to strangers, but this was a different age and time. Since most towns did not have lodging facilities, to open one's home to sojourners was good etiquette to offer hospitality. Normally, when a meal was served the blessing was offered by the host, but in this story, the stranger becomes the host. He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to these two. Does this remind you of something? For us, the liturgy of Holy Communion. For these two, they were also reminded of the way their hero, Jesus, would take bread, bless it, break it, and give it. Suddenly, they realized who was with them in their home. It was Jesus, the now Risen Christ. And then he vanishes as quickly as he appeared. The rumor was true. Jesus is alive. The women who went to the tomb were right.

This story, the Walk to Emmaus, is our story, too. For many we walk through life totally unaware that the Risen Lord walks with us, listening to all our gripes and griefs, and even teaching us and

guiding us on our journey. Reflect over your life. Have you experienced something like this? I have. Even though I was brought up in the church and knew cognitively the stories about Jesus, it wasn't until I was an adult that I came to recognize the Living Lord in my life. Unlike the two in whose home Jesus visited, it wasn't in the breaking of the bread that I recognized Jesus. I recognized Jesus in the hands and hearts of those who walked alongside me, who cared for me, and who served me in times of confusion, fear, anger, sadness, and hopelessness. Jesus became real to me through those who allowed me to sob on their shoulders, through those who allowed me to rant and rave about my struggles, through those who wrote encouraging notes, through those who carried me when I didn't think I could take another step. These people became Christ's hands, feet, ears, and heart for me. The Living Lord became real to me through others. The Living Lord can become real through others or in simple things like the breaking of bread, a sunbeam, a blooming tree, a voice, a hand, a story, a song, and many other innumerable ways. How have you recognized the Living Christ in your life? Or if you haven't yet, I encourage you to be open. The Living Christ is always with us, striving to find the means to open our eyes and hearts to become real to us. Like the two on their journey home, they knew in their minds the prophetic stories about the Messiah, but it wasn't until the Living Christ broke bread, that their hearts were open to receive him. They took a seven-mile journey home to discover this. For us, this journey is only twelve inches from the head to the heart. Yet, this journey can take some of us a lifetime.

In the Gospel according to John after Jesus fed the five thousand people, Jesus exclaims, "I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty...I am the bread that came down from heaven." Bread may have been the first food humans created from grains and other plants. Bread is an essential staple in every culture. And each culture has its own type of bread. For the Hebrews who wandered in the wilderness, the manna they collected daily, a starchy white substance, was a type of bread. They saw this bread as a gift from heaven. Bread is often part of every meal. There is nothing more satisfying than smelling bread baking, and then eating a warm, freshly baked slice smothered in melting butter. In our culture with many eating low carb diets, bread doesn't have the prominence it once had. But for those who live in impoverished areas, a piece of bread may be the only source of nourishment for the day. Bread is life. Bread offers sustenance: nutrition, energy, and staves off hunger. Bread also brings people together. Think of a dinner where hot rolls are brought to the table. Everyone digs in as they share together in the breaking of the bread. The Latin word for "breaking bread" is *companere*. We get the English word, companion, from *companere*. When we break bread together, we have companions for our journey. I think this is why most faith traditions have shared meals. The Muslims during Ramadan break their fast as a community after sunset with a feast. Each Sabbath the Jews have a meal after Shabbat services. And Christians break bread together at coffee hours, pot luck dinners, or fried chicken dinners. Each of us need companions for the journey. We also need bread to live: both the physical bread and the spiritual bread that Jesus offers. Jesus as the Bread of Life is the source of our spiritual sustenance. And the Risen Christ as Breaking Bread is our companion for our journey. He can both walk along side us and feed us the nourishment we need for the journey.

Reflection Questions: How has the Risen Christ been a source of spiritual sustenance for you? How has he been your companion for the journey?

Resources: *John: The Gospel of Light and Life* by Adam Hamilton; *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 2*, David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds.