

“Thanksgiving”

Luke 24:13-35

Sometimes the sacrament we have been focused on throughout the season of Lent is called the Lord’s Supper. Sometimes it is called Communion. Some Christians simply call it the Breaking of the Bread. Another common term is Eucharist, from the Greek noun *eucharistia* which means “thanksgiving.” We participate as an act of *thankfulness* for the grace and life we receive through our crucified and risen Lord. The Lord’s Supper expresses our participation with Christ, and it also reflects the reality that Jesus is risen. It is a celebration, not a funeral. Repentance, grief, and confession are part of the sacrament, but when our hearts “burn within us” we come to know the joy and gratitude of sharing this meal with Jesus.

Luke’s Emmaus Road narrative is one of the most transformational and most beautiful stories in all the Scriptures. What starts as a stroll with a stranger ends with an experience affirming the miracle of the resurrection. Emmaus was a village about 7 miles southeast of Jerusalem. It was the site of Judah Maccabee’s triumph over the cruel oppressors of the Jewish people, the military victory many had hoped Jesus would deliver. But archaeologists today can’t even find the ruins of Emmaus. It vanished without a trace. As a historical footnote this tells us that the destination was not really all that significant. *The journey with Jesus is what really counts.* Christ’s appearing in the lives of these two believers is the bottom line of the whole story.

I suppose we will all remember the horror of 9/11. Many in this country still grieve the losses of that day over 20 years ago. Wrap up all the grief from 9/11, combine it with dashed hopes and dreams destroyed from the previous week and we get a sense of the mood on the road to Emmaus. Despair and dejection weighed them down. The very last thing they expected to see as they walked the road was the risen Jesus. So, they didn’t see him.

The fact that Jesus went unrecognized is a very significant point of the story that resonates through the centuries. It tells us that Jesus is journeying with us

today, even when we don't recognize him. It tells us that if we don't look for him, we won't see him either. At the breaking of the bread, Jesus suddenly brought an end to the disciples' pity party. He awakened them to **thanksgiving**. He revealed himself as the risen Conqueror of sin and death. Remember the situation in recent days was heavy with the weight of evil. Pontius Pilate signed Jesus' death warrant after an unjust trial. Priests stirred up the mob to shout bloodthirsty cries of "*Crucify him!*" Backed by the military might of the Roman Empire, soldiers heartlessly drove spikes into Jesus' hands and feet. And Satan, the prince of darkness, sneered with perverse glee as God's Son hung, helpless, on a wooden Cross. Now the disciples cowered fearfully behind locked doors, hiding against the darkness of the night.

Is this what God's redemption looks like? If so, it couldn't be gloomier. But notice that in this story the gloriously risen Savior does not intrude. He doesn't come down the road doing cartwheels, knocking the disciples off their feet. He quietly joins them on the path and in their conversation. They set the pace. And he listens. He wants to know what is important to them. He obviously cares—both then and now. What matters to us, matters to him. No issue, no concern is off limits. With Jesus we may not always get what we want, but we always get what we need. So, let's add **thanksgiving** to the Easter picture.

They talked about everyday things—the economy, inflation, rising crime—and undoubtedly about their friend Jesus—his teaching, his healing, the way he was able to love everyone he met. Was it wise for him to have come to the city of Jerusalem, knowing the authorities were out to get him? Why did he take such a risk at the temple, overturning the tables of the money changers and shouting at the priests about the temple being a den of thieves? If only he had kept a low profile. If only he had done some things differently. If only...

Suddenly, the two friends are no longer alone. Someone walks with them, and he asks, "What are yinz talking about?" or whatever the Aramaic equivalent would be. They stop dead in their tracks. "What? WHAT??" Are you kidding

me? The next verse reads, “*Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?*” (24:18)

“*What things?*” the stranger asks. So, with deep sadness bordering on anger, the two share the events that gave them such heavy hearts—disappointment with religious leaders, distress over the political system which was so easily manipulated by evil men, despair at the loss of someone who personified all their hopes for the future. Sounds a lot like something we might see in the news today. Those things happen every day in every century. But something different was going on here. Along with the rage they were venting, they had a strange story that came from some of their women friends about an empty tomb, a vision of angels, and a risen Lord.

Well then, why did they leave Jerusalem? You would think that news about the tomb being empty might have prompted a change of plans. For whatever reason, they didn’t go to the tomb to find out personally, but, as they told their fellow traveler, “*Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus*” (v. 24). Did these travelers not believe the report of resurrection because it sounded too much like wishful thinking? Or maybe they chalked it up to grave robbers? Otherwise, why not stay in the city to see if Jesus would drop in? At every turn, Cleopas and the other disciple miss the point. They think they know where Jesus is—dead and buried. They’re not prepared for a *risen Jesus*, who walks with them along a common road and speaks to them of common things. But then, in the simplest action of all—the breaking of bread—it dawns on them who this man is. My question is: *What keeps their eyes from recognizing Jesus, the one whom we would expect them to yearn to see more than anyone else in the world?* I think the simple answer is this: They did not EXPECT to see him.

The same thing may have happened to us at one time or another. Have you ever been in an airport terminal or in a large crowd in a strange city, and seen someone who looks very, very familiar? In fact, they are the spitting image of someone you know quite well, but you were reluctant to go up to them and say

hello because you weren't absolutely CERTAIN it was them. Seeing them is totally UNEXPECTED, so you aren't willing to trust your own eyes.

The last thing they expected was to see the Lord himself overtaking them on a dusty road. They're not prepared for Jesus in such an ordinary place. We're just the same. We prefer to meet Jesus on our own terms; according to our expectations; at a safe distance, removed from our daily life. We treat him like a guest at a formal dinner party, not like a friend we'd call to meet for coffee.

Have we left Jesus in the tomb? Cemeteries are supposed to convey serenity. Apart from the occasional burial and the lawnmowing, nothing much happens in a cemetery. Would that be a good place for Jesus? Where nothing much happens? We're often content to go it alone where we live our lives. But please do not leave the risen, living Lord in the tomb. The resurrection of Jesus calls us to live as risen people in the reality of the miracle of Easter. It's the best news we've heard in a long, long, time. News meant to share. Once they realized Jesus was raised from the dead the two Emmaus disciples could not keep the good news to themselves. They hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the others what they had seen and heard. And ever since, the church in the world has been busy celebrating the wonderful news, **with thanksgiving**.

As I look out on those worshiping here today, I'm reminded that not one of us could have made it this far without the guiding, loving, eye-opening presence of the Risen Jesus who appeared on the road to Emmaus. Wherever the journey of life takes us—through twists and turns, dangers, and detours—I pray that the Lord of Life guides us on our journey home, and that he inspires renewed **thanksgiving** for the life he brings.

If the Lord's Supper expresses our participation with Christ, it must also reflect the reality that *Christ is alive!* When our hearts "burn within us" we too will know the joy and gratitude of sharing this meal with Jesus.

*"Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!"* Amen.