

IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

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First Presbyterian Church
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LUKE 24:13-35

“When He was at table with them, He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him.”

Luke 24:30-31a

I've got a feeling that Cleopas, and his unnamed companion who may have been “Mrs. Cleopas” had been around Jesus at meal time before.

Do you think they might have been there, on the side of the hill, when Andrew brought the little boy with five barley loaves and two fish to Jesus? Remember? Jesus took the loaves, and gave thanks, and distributed them, and they fed five thousand people that day. (John 6:1-15)

Maybe they'd been part of the crowd that day on the mountain overlooking the Sea of Galilee, when He took seven loaves and gave thanks and blessed and broke them and gave them to His disciples to give to the crowds. They fed four thousand that day. (See Matthew 15:32-29)

Perhaps they had been among those gathered in the Upper Room on the Thursday of Passover. We usually picture the gathering there as just the twelve at the table (all sitting on one side, just as DaVinci painted it!) (See Mark 14:12-25)

But there could have been others in the room. And they would have seen Jesus take the bread, and bless and break it, and they would have heard him say, “This is my body which is broken for you. Take, eat, in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19)

Why didn't they know Him, as they walked beside Him on the road to Emmaus? Why didn't they recognize Him, as He opened the scriptures to them, and told them all the things that they needed to know to be able to understand who He was? Who He is?

Luke tells us that their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. William Barclay speculates that they since were walking west from Jerusalem to Emmaus and the sun was setting, that the glare from the sun blinded them.

I think they did not recognize Him because they were not looking for Him. They thought Jesus was dead. Crucified dead and buried. They had heard what the women had said, and had heard that the tomb was empty, but they had not had an eye-witness report of a sighting of the risen Lord, so they did not believe that the Lord was risen. They didn't recognize Him because they thought He was dead, or missing, when He was right there with them all along.

But you think they would have recognized His voice. You think they would have gotten a hint from His teaching. But no, it was only when He took the bread, and blessed and broke it and gave it to them that their eyes were opened and they recognized Him.

Today, this morning, I will take the bread, and bless, and break it, and give it to the elders to give to you. I will tell you that this is His body broken for you.

I will lift the cup, and tell you that this is His blood shed for the remission of your sins.

I will tell you that we do this in remembrance of Him, and that we will do this remembering His death until He comes again.

But at the same time I am telling you that, I can also tell you that He is present with us. That He is here, now.

Theologians argue over the presence of Jesus in the sacrament. Since the twelfth century, the Roman Catholic Church has held to the doctrine of transubstantiation, which says that the bread and wine of the Sacrament literally become the body and blood of Christ. The Lutherans hold to a doctrine of consubstantiation, which teaches that the bread and the wine remain bread and Wine but that "the substances of Christ's body and blood were...united to them." (E.L. Mascall, *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, p.73)

The Study Catechism, adopted by our Presbyterian denomination about fifteen years ago, has this to say: "When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, the Lord Jesus Christ is truly present, pouring out his Spirit upon us. By his Spirit, the bread that we break and the cup that we bless share in our Lord's own body and blood. Through them he once offered our life to God; through them he now offers his life to us. As (we) receive the bread and the cup, remembering that Christ died even for (us), (we) feed on him in (our hearts) by faith with thanksgiving, and enter his risen life, so that his life becomes (ours), and (our) life becomes his, to all eternity." (Question 78)

We are not only reminded of His death, we become participants in His life, and in the life everlasting, through our participation in the Lord's Supper. This is truly as our Brief Statement of Faith calls it "the bread of life and the cup of salvation."

And all who are baptized into His church, all who believe in Him as Lord and Savior, all who are repentant of their sins and seeking His presence, are welcomed here.

Look around. Jesus is here. You can see His face in the face of the elder that serves you the sacrament. You can hear His voice in the hymns that we sing. The church is the body of Christ in the world, and wherever two or three are gathered in His name, Jesus is to be recognized there. If only in the breaking of the bread.

Let us pray.

Receive, O Lord, our thanks for your death upon the cross for our sins, and our rejoicing in your rising from the dead for our hope. Forgive us for the times when you were walking beside us, and we did not recognize you. Forgive us for the time when we heard your teaching, and ignored it. Forgive us for ever breaking bread without acknowledging your presence at the table. And renew us by the Spirit, that you may truly dwell in us, and we may truly dwell in you. In your precious name, Jesus, we make this and all our prayers. Amen.