

## It's Always the Table

Luke 24: 13-35 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles<sup>[i]</sup> from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup>but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.<sup>[g]</sup> <sup>18</sup>Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" <sup>19</sup>He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth,<sup>[h]</sup> who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, <sup>20</sup>and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. <sup>21</sup>But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.<sup>[i]</sup> Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, <sup>23</sup>and when they did not find his body there they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. <sup>24</sup>Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him."<sup>25</sup> Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Messiah<sup>[i]</sup> should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" <sup>27</sup>Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. <sup>28</sup>As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup>But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup>They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us<sup>[k]</sup> while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" <sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" <sup>35</sup>Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The stories in the gospels leading up to Jesus' death are loud. There's the entry into Jerusalem with crowds shouting "Hosanna" and waving palms. There's Jesus going into the temple and overturning tables. There's the crowds shouting, "Crucify, crucify." By contrast, the stories after Jesus' resurrection are quiet. Jesus spends his time doing the simplest, most ordinary things possible—folding up and putting away his dirty laundry in the tomb, wandering through the garden, literally the closest we get to someone stopping to smell the roses, having gentle conversations, cooking fish over a campfire on a beach for his buddies, or, in our passage today, taking long aimless walks with friends in the wrong direction and then sharing a meal with them.

After the resurrection, there are no more miracles. No exorcisms. No sermons. No parables. No pointed arguments with religious leaders. Almost none of the things that had previously defined Jesus show up after the Resurrection. I'm always struck by how ordinary the post resurrection stories are. It seems like that after everything that had happened, the resurrected Jesus would want to do something huge, something to tell the world with a loud voice, "I'm back!"

But that's not what happens.

So often we look at Holy Week and glean the message that because Christ suffered and died, it means that Christ is with us in our own suffering and death. We remember that God has entered into our most horrible moments, that God has taken on our suffering, taken on our death. Because Jesus suffered and died, we trust that when we find ourselves in the depths of pain and despair, that God is right there with us.

And then on Easter Sunday, we transform the soulful mourn of, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord," into the triumphant, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today." We celebrate that life and love came bursting out of the grave. We go from our most solemn time in the church year to the most celebratory.

In one week, we experience the lowest of lows and the highest of highs. But to be honest, most of us don't spend the majority of our lives in the extremities of life. There are intense seasons that can plunge us into crisis and that can leave lasting marks on our bodies and our souls, to be sure. And there are times when it seems that life is so good that we walk around as if we're floating on air.

But neither of those experiences are the reality where most of us spend the vast majority of our lives. Usually we find ourselves somewhere in between. Perhaps the Resurrected Christ is meant to assure us that God isn't with us only in crisis or in triumph, but that God is also with us in every single moment, even the ordinary, mundane, and even boring moments of life. The Resurrected Christ has transformed our laundry, our cooking, our conversations, our long walks, our gardening, our interactions with our families, and every meal into an act of resurrection.

And that's especially true in our passage today.

Throughout the gospel of Luke, the writer wants to make sure we understand how important breaking bread together is for Jesus. And just in case we've missed the point, he includes one final story at the end of the gospel just to make sure we really get it. In our Scripture we read earlier, two of Jesus' followers are on the road to Emmaus. These are not central characters in the gospel. They aren't part of the 12, but are instead part of the larger community of people who followed Jesus. In fact, this is the only account in all of the gospels we have of these two

people. And as they travel, they are discussing how Jesus had died and, even though they had heard from Mary and the women that Jesus was risen, it's clear that don't believe it.

And then Jesus shows up and starts walking with them, but they don't recognize him. So Jesus starts explaining why the Messiah must die. He starts teaching them the Bible. And continues talking Bible and theology with them for the entire trip. But they still don't recognize him. It is only when Jesus sat down at the table with them, when he took bread and broke it that that finally see him for who he truly is. Notice that it wasn't in a discussion about theology or Scripture but rather around the table that they were able to finally recognize Jesus.

I love this story because it tells us both how we recognize Jesus and how we share Jesus. Notice that even Jesus could not reveal himself to them through talking about the Bible, through talking about theology. Words couldn't convince them that Jesus was there with them. It was only when Jesus took bread and broke it, it was only when Jesus sat down to share a meal with them that they were able to see him for who he truly was.

That's when they were able to say, "It's Jesus."

It's Jesus who ate with those thought to be righteous and those thought to be sinful.

It's Jesus who ate with tax collectors and lepers.

It's Jesus who always had a place at the table for everyone.

This is who Jesus is and this is how we recognize him and this is how we share him.

More and more I think the hope that we Christians have to offer the world is not in big, grandiose things, not in complex arguments about why our way is right, but rather in something as simple as sitting around a table to share a meal and to have a conversation.

You see, when we sit down together at a table, we have time to listen to each other, we have time to learn one another's stories, we have time to see where someone else is coming from. What might happen in this time of incredible division if instead of shouting about why we're right, we instead offered the simple invitation, "Can we have dinner and talk?"

Or what might happen in a time when study after study has shown people experiencing loneliness at incredibly high levels, we intentionally sought out those who often eat alone and said, "Why don't you join our family for dinner?"

I don't mean to suggest that sharing a meal with people can solve all the world's problems nor do I want you to think that I'm naïve enough to suggest that we can overcome all division and polarization just by sitting down together at a table. But what I do believe is that it's almost always a good place to start.

We live in a world with huge problems and it is so tempting to try to find huge solutions. I know I want to find something big that can solve all that is wrong. But Jesus takes a different approach. Instead of offering grand solutions, he talked about how the kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed. And then he practiced that by inviting himself over for dinner. For Jesus, it always starts small.

As we imagine how we might make a difference in the world and in what role we as a church can play, we'd do well to remember that.

*There's been a lot of talk (and a lot of fretting) among pastors and denominational leaders about what the future of church might be. [The Pew Center recently released the results](#) of a study that suggests that at the current rate of decline of those who identify as Christians, it won't be too long before self-identified Christians are in the minority in the United States. The fastest growing group in their survey are the "nones" and "dones." Whether we like it or not, there will be increasingly fewer and fewer people who claim Christianity or attend church and this will have huge implications for how we have traditionally done church.*

*Christians in the U.S. will increasingly find ourselves in a social space that maybe we were intended to occupy all along. The early church were part of a fringe religious movement outside the framework of main stream culture. No one joined one of Paul's churches because it was the cultural thing to do or because it gave you a place to get married or because it gave you a higher degree of social respectability. If you joined, you joined because you found something deeply meaningful. You joined because you wanted to come together around a table with others, you believed that somehow God met you at that table, and that from the meal you received together, God equipped you to be instruments of love and justice and peace in the world even if you were thought to be a little weird by those around you, or, in a lot of cases, thrown into jail or even killed.*

*Aside from being persecuted, I think the western church will increasingly find itself in a similar situation. We won't be able to "attract" people to come because being a part of the church is part of our culture. We might be thought to be a little weird. And that's ok because when church is no longer a part of the status quo, we can get serious about things like love and justice and peacemaking. And perhaps, we can re-discover why it was a table and not a cathedral that Jesus invited us to in the first place.*

Going forward, I'm convinced that more and more the right invitation to ask someone will not be, "Would you like to come to church?" Instead, it will be, "Would you like to join me for dinner?"