

# In the Breaking of the Bread

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Luke 24:13-35

April 26, 2009

(THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER)

**This is the table of the Lord.  
Come, not because you are strong,  
but because you are weak  
Come, not because any goodness of your own  
gives you a right to come,  
but because you need mercy and help.  
Come because you love the Lord a little  
And would like to love him more.  
Come, because the Lord loves you  
and gives himself for you...**

I'd like to tell you a story this morning. A few stories, really. Which is what I do every Sunday, I guess. But it'll be a little different this morning. Because these are my favorites. Really. At least for today.

And the first one is about somebody who wanted to find God. A little boy, in fact. One day he decided to go and find him... to find God. Because he'd heard a lot about him in Sunday School and church. And he'd always it would be really neat to meet him. In person. And it would be really nice to get to know God, he thought. Because they could be friends. But he knew it might be a long way to the place where God lived, so he packed his backpack full of supplies for the long journey ahead. Twinkies, mostly... and some Root Beer. And then he was off and on his way to find the Lord.

And when he had walked a couple of blocks, or so, he saw an old woman. Somebody's grandma he figured. And she was sitting on a park bench watching the pigeons there in the park. And the little boy walked up and

sat down on that very same bench. And he opened up his backpack. And he was just about to pop open a root beer and quench his thirst, when he noticed that the old lady looked like she might be a little hungry. So he reached into his pack, pulled out a Twinkie, and handed it to her. And she smiled at the kind little boy and accepted his gift.

And that was it. Her smile was so warm and so pretty, he thought, that he wanted to see it again. So he reached into his backpack and pulled out a root beer. And he popped the top and offered it to her. And she smiled again at this thoughtful young boy. And he was delighted, of course, that she did. And that's how it was all afternoon. They sat on the bench and ate Twinkies and drank root beers and smiled at each other. Didn't say a word to each other the whole time they were there, mind you. They just watched the birds, feasted on Twinkies, and smiled at each other.

But after a while, the sun started to hide behind the treetops on the hill. And the boy was tired, so he got up to go home. But before he had gone more than three or four steps, he stopped. And he turned around and ran back to the woman. And he threw his arms round her and gave her a hug. And she hugged *him*, too. And she smiled the biggest smile ever....

A few moments later, the boy was back home. And he ran up the steps, through the back door and into the kitchen. And his mother, of course, could not help but notice how *happy* he was. And she said, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" And he looked up and said, "I had lunch with God." And before his mother could say anything, really, he went to say, "You know what, mom? God has the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

And at about the same time, a few blocks away, the old woman was back at her home, as well. And when she walked in, her son was just *amazed* when he saw her. Because she had this look on her face. And she just seemed to be glowing, he thought -- the picture of joy and delight and

... peace. So he said, "Mom? What did you do today to make you so happy?" And she said, "I ate Twinkies today in the park with God." And before the young man could even open his mouth she said, "And you know, son, he's much younger than I thought he would be."

**Ordinary bread made by ordinary people  
is holy when we take and eat and remember.**

**Ordinary grapes taken by ordinary people  
and made into ordinary wine  
are holy when we hold the wine to our lips  
and drink and remember.**

Ordinary bread and ordinary wine ... and sometimes, *sometimes* mind you, even Root Beer and Twinkies can be holy.

My grandmother used to say it like this: "**When two or three are gathered**, she would say, "**Set another place at the table because he'll be there, too.** Jesus will be there. You can count on it, she'd say.

I think, maybe, I've told you about having communion at the pond when I was a kid. If we had communion at church, I'd go home that afternoon and change out of my church clothes and put on my favorite sweatshirt and some old blue jeans. And I'd sneak into the kitchen and put a slice or two of *Heiner's* bread into my dad's lunchbox. And I'd pour some grape juice into his thermos. And I'd take it down to Ferguson Pond (which was right beside our house) and Mitzi, my beagle, would come along *with* me. And we'd sit there together on the old wooden bridge. And I'd tear off a little piece of bread and dip it into the grape juice and say, "Mitzi, this is the body of Christ broken for you."

And Mitzi was such a good dog. She'd always go along with me, no matter what. So she'd take the bread from my hand and gobble it up. ✕ And then I would tear off a little chunk for me. And I'd tell myself the same thing

-- that this was the body and blood of Jesus. And we'd sit on the bridge and look out over the pond. And as strange and as silly as it sounds, I'd look for him... for Jesus, I mean. I'd try to see if I could hear him somewhere, or see him, maybe, up in the clouds, or across the pond. Because my grandma always said that **When two or three are gathered in his name ... he'd be there, too.**

I didn't see him, mind you, or hear his voice. But I can remember sitting there thinking, "He's gotta be here somewhere." Because I just had that feeling, you know... that I wasn't alone. In a *good* way, I mean. Like the feeling you get when it's dark and dreary and you're a little afraid, and then you remember that you're not alone. Your mom and dad are there with you. And they love you. They do ...

**When two or three are gathered ... set another place at the table** (grandma would say) **because he'll be there, too.** And it's true. It's true. Especially when we gather at his table to break the bread, and eat, and remember ....

It's like the little girl who was with her mom in church one Sunday when they had the Lord's Supper. That morning she stood up in the pew beside her mom so she could see the acolytes and the choir and the preacher come in with their pretty long robes. And she watched them take their places around the altar. And when the preacher said, "Let us pray," she bowed her head and folded her hands and closed her eyes ... though she did sneak a little peek once, just to see if her big brother had *his* eyes closed. And at the end of the prayer she said, "Amen" just like the big people did. And this wee little girl even listened to the preacher that morning... the poor thing.

And that Sunday was Communion Sunday at their church. So after the sermon the pastor took bread. And he blessed it and broke it. And the people came forward to eat the Lord's Supper. And the little girl watched them take bread in their hands and dip it into the wine. And she saw them

touching and hugging each other. And maybe *her* grandma said it, too. Or maybe she just knew. Because she turned to her mom and this is what she said, *"Mommy, when do I get to go... When do I get to go and have lunch with Jesus."* ✕

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Ordinary bread and ordinary wine...

That's what happened in Emmaus, you know. Ordinary bread and ordinary wine became something more -- something holy and good -- something that made a difference in the lives of Jesus' disciples. For you see, two of them -- two of Jesus' disciples were on a journey that day. Easter it was -- a little later that day, Cleopas and his companion went walking back to Emmaus the little town where they lived. And I have a feeling they were looking for God. Or maybe they were just wondering where he was and where he had been. Because they'd been to Jerusalem that week. A lot of folks had. Because it was a holiday -- the biggest and most important holiday and holy day of all in those days. It was the Passover weekend. The most wonderful time of the year for God's people. ✕ But not that year. That year there wasn't anything wonderful about it.

[For...] On Thursday, Jesus and his companions gathered around the table to break bread together. (Which is what the word *companion* means, you know. It comes from the Latin words *com* and *pānis*. And it means "with bread" -- people who break bread together.) So that's what they did in the

upper room. They broke the bread ... their last supper, their last meal with Jesus their Teacher. And then, you know, they went out to the Garden of Gethsemane to be with God and to pray.

And that's when it all turned sour for them. Because the temple guards came, while Jesus was praying! And they arrested Jesus. Put him on trial that very night. And by three o'clock the next day, just a few hours before sunset and the beginning of the Sabbath, Jesus was gone. Crucified, dead, and buried.

And just like that their whole world changed. It was cold and dark and evil. Nothing wonderful about it. Because the One who came to show them God's love -- the One who came because of God's love -- came face to face with all that was evil and hateful in this world. And that was it. The light of their lives went out just like that. Can you imagine? They had such high *hopes* for him. I mean, they had hoped (and they had believed) that Jesus could set things *right* in the world.... And then Passover came. Only *this* time a different *kind* of lamb was sacrificed and slaughtered.

So there they were, Cleopas and his companion, walking back home to a world that would never be the same -- without a hope in the world.

But then someone else came along. Walked up behind them, I guess. And when they told him why they were so discouraged, he started talking about the bible, the Books of Moses (they called them) and the prophets. And they're probably thinking, "What does all that old stuff have to do with us? That was then, this is now. The world just isn't *like* that anymore.

But the Traveler went on. And he told them that somewhere along the way the message got garbled. But it's all there [it always is] -- it says that

the Christ *would* suffer and die, and then on the third day be raised from the dead.

And by that time, of course, they were nearly home. And it was beginning to get dark. And when the stranger had taken maybe three or four steps, Cleopas and his friend stopped the man and said, "It's late and it will soon be dark. Come stay with us." And he accepted their hospitality and joined them that evening in Emmaus for Sunday dinner.

And there at the table they had the strangest feeling. A good, even holy kind of feeling. The kind you have when you're in the presence of Somebody who loves you and cares for you. And you know that they're *with* you.

It was that kind of feeling, I think. Because there at the table the Stranger took a loaf of ordinary bread. And he blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to them -- as if this was **his** table and **they** were the guests. And when he did that ... well it was as if someone lit a lamp in a darkened room. And they could see! They could see it now. And it wasn't just a feeling, mind you. They weren't alone. Somebody was *with* them. And this Stranger was no stranger at all. It was Jesus. He had risen from the dead! And because **he** was raised **they** were raised, too.

And why wouldn't they be? Jesus was with them. They couldn't see it before, mind you, but now they knew that he'd been with them on the journey -- he was with them in the words of the Traveler and in the words of the scriptures. Jesus was with them in the breaking of the bread -- ordinary bread shared between people who longed for God's grace and God's healing and love.

Oh, and you know the rest of the story -- how Cleopas and his companion ran from the table that evening all the way back to Jerusalem to tell all the others. And when they found them they were singing and shouting already -- "Jesus is risen! And Peter has seen him!" And Cleopas and the other disciple told them how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread.

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I love that story -- the story of Cleopas and his friend -- because it's *our* story, too. Yours and mine. The truth is we're all on a journey looking for God. It's why so many churches these days have what they call Seeker services. It's worship designed especially for people who are searching for something more in their lives. It's for people who may never have been to church before, but have a longing inside for God. And it's for people who are hurting and lonely. People who know something's missing in their lives. And it's for people who may have given up on the church or people who have been hurt by the church. But what they all have in common I think is a hunger -- a deep longing for something more. And we're all on that journey. Whether we're looking for healing or forgiveness or love or acceptance we are all on a journey like Cleopas and his companion...

We all walk that same road. And it rises and falls. And the shadows are dark and dreary in places. And in other places the sun shines through. And like Cleopas and that other disciple, our hearts can be awfully heavy at times. And our hope slips away.

And it's in those places along the journey, when the next seven miles seems more like seventy, that we long for his company -- the Lord's presence and peace. If only we could see him walking beside us. Which he is. God is with us. We believe that -- we do. It's just that sometimes it's awfully hard to recognize him when he is.

This scripture was a favorite among some of the earliest Christians, you know. Because it told them that seeing Christ and knowing his presence in their lives would come the same way it came to those two followers of Jesus -- through reading the scriptures, and welcoming others with kindness and love. Through giving and sharing, and breaking bread with others in life *and* in worship. The Light would shine. And their eyes would open. And they would see and know that Jesus is risen ... and that he is with them and walks with them every step of the way.

### Ordinary bread and ordinary wine ...

There's one more story I want to tell you this morning, one of my favorites. It's about two sisters -- two little girls Identical twins. And both of them blind from the time they were born. When they were ten years old, their father lost his job. It was right before Christmas. And they knew, of course, that Christmas would be different that year, because they had hardly enough money even for groceries. So Christmas, they thought, would just be like any other day.

On Christmas morning, they were all sitting together at the breakfast table. And their mother started praying the Lord's prayer. *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, she prayed. And when she came to give us this day our daily bread, her voice gave way and they could hear their mother crying. So they finished the prayer for her all the way to the end.*

Just as they finished, they heard a knock at the door. It was one of the neighbors. She had brought a basket of fresh-baked bread for their breakfast. And there's just something about the smell of bread -- something good and wholesome and holy. It smells like home -- like love. The kind of love that's there when you know you're not alone, when you're with someone who cares, someone you can depend on, someone who's with you and for you no matter what ...

And one of the sisters said that it wasn't until she sensed the fragrance of bread and the joy in their mother's voice that she realized that there was no bread (no food) on the table that morning. And that's when they knew that Jesus was there -- that Jesus was with them and for them no matter what. It was when the neighbor came carrying not just a basket of bread, but the fragrance of Christ who is the Bread of Life.

Let me ask you this morning -- Has your hope slipped away? Is your heart sometimes heavy like Cleopas and his companion? Do you ever feel like you're all alone on this journey? Then Come. Come to the table. Come and be fed. **For Jesus the Christ is still made known in the breaking of bread.**

**This is the word which is given for you. Amen.**

**Soli Deo Gloria**  
**Benen, ObISB**



