

## **In the Breaking of Bread**

Luke 24:13-35

### **RECOGNIZING A FRIEND**

I was ordained on January 17, 2009. Ordination is one of the biggest, most important things that will happen to a pastor. It's a minister's first chance to publicly accept her calling and God's unique claim on the rest of her life. Almost everyone I loved and who nurtured me along my way was in the sanctuary so they could bear witness, affirm who I was and would be, and bless me and my ministry to come. Was I nervous? Yes. But more than that, I was energized and excited and beyond distracted by every detail. The service went beautifully. One of my favorite parts was communion. Two of my seminary friends and I served, while the congregation looped around and ate the meal while being able to see every other person's face.

One person's face stood out from the rest. A man I didn't recognize but certainly seemed to recognize me. He was grinning from ear to ear and staring me straight in the eyes. I smiled right back, but in my head I was like, "Who was *that* guy?" It wasn't until the end of the service, when he was close enough to touch, that I saw him for who he really was. My best friend from high school, bald as the day he was born, and just plain wonderful. Greg Hamburger in the flesh. I almost hugged him to death.

### **OUT OF CONTEXT**

Have you ever seen somebody at a place and time you didn't expect? Like seeing your third grade teacher buying bananas at Walmart, just like a regular person? Now imagine seeing a person you never expected to see again in this life. I think that's what it must have been like for the two men in today's scripture. The beginning of today's text is from Luke's 24:13-16.

Now on that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and taking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

A man they had loved and followed and believed to be the Messiah sent to save them had been brutally killed. Their entire lives and all of their hopes had been murdered alongside him. They were consumed with grief and confusion. All they could talk about, all they could think about, and all they could see was their loss. It's no wonder they didn't recognize Jesus when he showed up.

### **AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED?**

Then, as recorded in Luke 24:17-24, the man who met them started a conversation:

And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 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?"

He asked them, "What things?"

"The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 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. 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."

Instead of sympathizing with them, the stranger got a little snarky:

"Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then, beginning with Moses and the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

Even though Jesus was a bit sharp with the two men, he met them where they were and began to reveal himself a little bit at a time.

### **I WONDER**

I wish I could have been there to hear Jesus put everything into perspective. I wonder what scriptures he interpreted. I wonder how he made it make sense to those two men. I wonder if it would have made sense to me, a woman living 2,000 years later in the world of Internet connection and Starbucks coffee. My understanding is different than theirs would have been. Different stories and sayings would have related to them. Their experience and mine would have given us different perspectives, certain things would have been important to them that I couldn't begin to understand and vice versa. I wonder how Jesus would have made the story of his life, death, resurrection, and salvation make sense to me now.

### **BACK AND FORTH**

Jesus' revelation didn't stop with his teaching, though. He had more to share, but it was up to the men to take the next step, and they did so in the next two verses:

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over."

The story the men told to the stranger on the road gave Jesus the opportunity to give them new understanding. Their invitation allowed Jesus to give them even more of himself. Maybe the men were changed when they heard the stranger interpret the scriptures. Maybe they were just being hospitable. Or maybe they were remembering Jesus' teaching before he was crucified, calling them to care for the hungry stranger. There was a back-and-forth between the men and the man they didn't yet recognize.

First the men worried aloud over the things that had happened to Jesus. They were essentially asking a question: "How could this have happened if Jesus was the Messiah?" Next the stranger approached the men and asked his own question. This gave the men the opportunity to share their sad story with the man. The stranger then responded by revealing Jesus as the Messiah by interpreting the teachings of God through Moses and the prophets as recorded in scripture. Then the men took the next step by inviting the stranger to stay with them, and the stranger did.

Together the two men and a man they didn't yet know built a relationship and tossed a ball back and forth. Call and response. Call and response. Each one depending on the other.

### **ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER**

Luke 24:30-35 records the next toss when the two men gave their guest the opportunity to say grace. This was all Jesus needed to fully reveal himself to them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

When Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, the men's eyes were opened. Regardless of how much their lives had changed since Jesus' crucifixion, regardless of how much hope they had lost and how much confusion they were experiencing, the stranger in their midst became the living Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Jesus, acting like himself, giving of himself, was the last piece to fit into place. Jesus became real to them; Jesus came to life again. Jesus fed them, and their hopes – their very *lives* – were reborn.

### **RECOGNIZING JESUS**

How easy is it for us to recognize Jesus in the world right now? The world is still struggling to fight a deadly disease, mass shootings and other acts of violence abound, protests and discord have led to division, and fear has sent us under cover for over a year. Our congregation is just now coming up for air, and it's almost like reestablishing the church all over again. It is difficult enough for those of us who have a solid foundation of scripture, worship, serving others, and communion. Imagine how hard is it for those who *don't* believe to make sense of what is going on. We may be asking the same questions, but faithful Christians have the resurrection to give us hopeful answers, while others do not.

How do we help those others to recognize Jesus and the hope he offers? Today's scripture shows us the way. We begin by meeting them where they are to walk alongside them. We listen to them as they express their worries and confusion. We confidently offer the gospel to them in terms they can understand and that encourages them to invite us to stay. We serve them in ways that feed their bodies, minds, and spirits until they recognize the living Jesus and the hope he offers.

### **WE REMAIN**

While Jesus appeared only once more to the disciples in the Gospel of Luke, he eventually ascended to heaven leaving *them* to live out and carry the gospel of salvation to others. We too remain. We are the ones who keep the resurrected Jesus in the world, alive in us.