

Took, Blessed, Broke, Gave
Luke 24:13-35

Third Sunday of Easter/6th April 2008/ Sacrament of Holy Communion

There's something exceedingly profound about this Emmaus encounter, found only here in Luke. Since I was a teenager, this text has always fascinated me; it never fails to yield new layers of meaning and beauty. It's an Easter story and yet it's rarely heard on Easter. We prefer to hear what happened Easter morning. But what happened Easter evening is just as significant, and – dare I say – maybe more so.

On Easter evening two nameless disciples decide they've had enough of Jerusalem and escape to Emmaus. They couldn't get the recent events of the weekend out of their heads, they couldn't shake the shock from stories that Jesus was alive. In their journey of grief, Jesus arrives; he draws up alongside of them and walks with them. Never asserting himself but with the utmost respect for them he asks, "What are you talking about?" They tell him. *We had hoped.... We had hoped....* He tries to explain to them the meaning of what they experienced. He starts with Moses and works his way up to the present, interpreting scripture. But this stranger wasn't making any sense.

They arrive in Emmaus, the journey complete for two of them. The third acts as if he has farther to go – he always has farther to go, this Jesus of ours; he's always eager to take us farther, always eager to go on – but they invite him to stay, urge him, for it is late and the day is almost over. So they went into their house, all three.

When it was time to eat, Jesus the guest takes the bread, as if he were the host, offers thanks to God for it, tears it, and then gives it to them. The one who came to serve, serves. And then it happened, in *that* moment they knew who he was. It's when he took bread and blessed it, broke it, and then gave it to them – this entire sequence, this entire four-step experience – that they recognized him. It was as if they'd seen this before, but where? This was more than *déjà vu*. Where have we seen this before? Here, he graciously demonstrates what he tried to explain earlier in the day on the road, to make clear what they didn't understand; he *acts* the story of salvation; moving beyond the interpretation of a text, he picks up the bread and shows them.

Jesus vanishes and they run – at night (no one travelled at night) because this couldn't wait until morning. They flew back to Jerusalem and discovered there had been other Jesus sightings all over the place. He appeared to Simon. He was up in Emmaus, they say, and we recognized him in the breaking of the bread. Soon Jesus would stand there among them and say, "Peace be with you." And they jumped with fear as if they saw a ghost – I would have. But there's no reason to fear when God is involved. "*Why are you frightened...?*" He shows him his wounds and says, "Here, touch and see for yourself." *Don't be afraid*. And while they were "disbelieving for joy" – I love this, one of my favorite phrases in scripture – and totally perplexed, Jesus says – I love this, too – "Have you anything here to eat?" So real. So honest.

More and more I'm becoming convinced that in this story we are given the keys to the kingdom, deep insight into the inner-workings of the mind of God, a glimpse into some

primordial pattern or secret of the ages. Here we find God's style. This is the answer to the riddle of life, the meaning of human existence. Here we can feel the rhythm of the universe; it's what makes the real world – God's world – tick. *It's God's way of operating through Jesus and if Jesus is alive within us, it's the way God's people, the church, operate in the world.* It's what it really means to be Christian: Took. Blessed. Broke. Gave. That's it. We are called to take or receive the gifts given to us by God (which is everything we have) and acknowledge them as gifts not belonging to us. Then we bless them, that is, we offer them up to God with thanks, with gratitude. And then we *break* them – we take a risk with them, we divide up what we have. Why? In order to give it away, in order to share it with others, so that they might take and receive these gifts and bless them, then break them and give them.

It's the pattern of the Lord's Supper and the pattern of the supper at Emmaus, every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper and every meal we share around *any* table, the pattern preaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Took. Blessed. Broke. Gave. This is at the heart of the Christian life, the core of who we are and what we do. *This pattern at the table must inform the pattern of our lives away from the table.* This pattern is what it means to say, "I believe in Jesus Christ," or that "I love the Lord," or "I want to follow him."

Perhaps the crucial element of this pattern is the breaking and perhaps the most difficult. We can be happy to receive any and every gift from God and we can be ever thankful for it, living grateful lives. But if it ends there, then that's not the way of Christ. There can be no giving, no true blessing, no sharing, we cannot become truly generous, our lives cannot reflect the crucified Lord without the breaking, without the fraction, without the rending, without the sacrifice, without yielding and finally letting go. *It was in the breaking that they knew Jesus, because they saw in him the one who was broken and they witnessed in his breaking the willingness of God to be broken.* Being broken paved the way for Jesus to give his life to you and me and the person beside you. We would not be able to receive him, receive the gift of his life within us if it were not for his willingness to be broken. It's the broken one who is Lord and Savior, servant and host of this meal.

In my journey as a Christian and as a minister, I believe all the more that Christ is known in the broken places, perhaps only there. Well, maybe not only there, but especially there. Where are these broken places? You know.

I also believe it's possible for Christians to miss Christ's presence because they resist going to the broken places – either in themselves or in others, or they live safe, predictable, conventional lives, avoiding anything that might be risky or scary. We can live this way and still be Christian, of course; God still loves us. But I wonder if when we do, we also miss out on the joy, the grace, the blessing, the celebration that comes when we risk and then give, when we risk and thereby create new opportunities for people to live and receive the gifts of God?

Presbyterian theologian William Placher reflects what this meal does to us, how it forms us. In an essay entitled "Eating Gracefully," he writes, "As Christians we are called to take risks, to make ourselves vulnerable in love, to share with strangers, to dare to challenge unjust power and take the consequences." We can't help but think of Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) in this context, particularly this weekend 40 years after his death. "And we are promised joy and

celebration, not as a reward bestowed extrinsically after having paid the price of enough suffering, but rather in that a life of vulnerable love is itself a life of joy.”¹

That’s the kind of church I imagine Christ yearns for. That’s the church I dream of. It’s the church I yearn for. It’s possible. Not easy, but possible. Receiving. Blessing. Breaking. Giving. A church not afraid to take risks in his name. A church willing to be challenged and made uncomfortable, even uneasy in order to experience all the more Christ’s joy and grace working through us. A church that risks a life of vulnerable love, that risks being broken and entering broken places. I’ve seen it here in this church and others, especially last Sunday evening in Philadelphia. I was there to attend the Covenant Network Board meeting on Monday at Broad Street Ministries.² (Our middle school class had a mission trip there earlier this year which inspired our current clothing drive for the local homeless). My friends Erika and Bill are the two directors of this new community that provides food and shelter for the homeless, Bible studies during the week, and worship on Sunday evenings, among other ministries. It was truly a profound and moving experience for me to be there in their worship space. The music was amazing. We sang old hymns, like “Leaning On the Everlasting Arms,” as if they were written for today. There were about 160 people, about half were homeless, recovering addicts, mentally ill, people suffering from HIV/AIDS, broken people beaten up by life. The rest were people like you and me, with food on our tables and warm beds. People come from as far away as Princeton to worship there. They have Communion every week, by intinction. I’ve worshipped in diverse community before, but never worshipped in the midst of that kind of diversity, with the obviously broken and the broken who are successful and adept in hiding theirs. In Erika’s invitation to the Table she reminded us, “There’s more here than bread and wine.” She encouraged us not to take a small piece of bread, but a hefty chunk, then to dip it in wine or juice. The first to the Table eager and with joy were the hungriest and homeless, who were not afraid to tear off a large piece of bread, dip it in the cup, and eat it, savoring it on the way back to their seats. They went to the Table hungry. Do we? I wondered how the bread tastes for them? Christ was there, surely recognized in the breaking of the bread.

So come with your hunger to this table, come with joy. Yes, awe at Christ’s broken presence here, but also joy, joy, in receiving the gracious welcome of God. The Lord, Calvin (1509-1564) wrote, has “given us a Table at which to feast, not an altar upon which to offer a victim; he has not consecrated priests to offer sacrifice, but ministers to distribute the sacred banquet.”³ A sacred banquet shared among *all* God’s people, in community – receiving the gifts of God, and blessing God for them, breaking them, dividing them, risking them, yielding them, in order to share them, to give them. When we live this way in all that we do, people will recognize Jesus in us, we will recognize Jesus in each other, and we will recognize Jesus working through us.

¹ William C. Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 148. Cf. the quotation from the worship bulletin, cited in Placher. “What stands out is the sheer abundance of Jesus’ gifts... Although he had not a stone on which to lay his head, he and his disciples, even the listening bystanders, never went short of anything.” Dutch theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx (b. 1914), *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (1981).

² For more information about their ministry see www.broadstreetministry.org.

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4. 18.12, cited in Placher, 147.

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