

## 4/4/21 EASTER SERVICE

WELCOME – PASTOR LOIS

Happy Easter on this gorgeous April morning!

Welcome to each one worshipping with us this morning – here, in-person as well as from your homes, zooming in; we're grateful for your presence.

Many thanks to Caiden and Chelan Duerksen for ringing the church bell this morning.

There is a staffed nursery available this morning for children up through 3 years old. The 2 & 3 yr olds will go outside to the playground after the Children's Story and return to the nursery before the end of the service. Thank you to Bryant and Chrystiana, Laura and Kim for staffing the nursery this morning.

MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR LOIS

You are the God of Mystery and New Life – we praise and worship you on this resurrection morning! Like your very first disciples, Jesus, we confess that it's so hard for us to embrace that which we don't really understand with our logical, rational minds. On this Easter day in 2021, we need, as much as ever, your presence with us along the road, as we sit down to eat, as we live our lives. Open the scriptures to us so that we can grasp the truth of your life, death and resurrection. Help us to realize that when we live in your truth, we are completely liberated to follow your upside down, radical ways of love. We are free to catch the world by surprise with responses and ideas that are selfless, encouraging, justice-seeking and filled with the good news of your love and redemption. In many ways we are like your first disciples. Heart-broken, weighed down by the troubles in this world and our own, personal troubles. We are confused and unable to recognize you in our midst. Come to us clearly, Jesus. Reveal yourself to us as we make ourselves available to your Holy Spirit.

O God, we pray for your healing – healing that comes in so many ways. We pray for healing for Steve Banman as his body recovers now from this second surgery. We pray for Sandy too as she is there, at his side. We pray for Allison and Bino and for Craig as they keep up with Steve's situation from afar. Grant them all your comfort and assurance of your presence. We pray for Joyce and Dan as Joyce regains her strength again this week. Continue to be with them and Greg and Jenny on this journey. Give them also your healing for their bodies, minds and spirits.

O God, this world and our own lives are filled with stories and experiences of fear, division, pain and anger. We want to receive your Spirit of understanding, wisdom, peace-with-justice-making and love. Grant us resurrection this day – of our hearts and spirits. Fill us with your Easter joy. Lead us as we strive to follow Jesus in our daily living. We pray in his name. A

## PRAYER OF DEDICATION – PASTOR LOIS

Ordinarily we would pass the plates to receive gifts and tithes of our finances, but we're still being covid-cautious with that, so we encourage you to drop your offerings in the box in the lobbies or send them in the mail, but we still bless the gifts! So I invite you to stand now as we pray:

Giver of all good gifts, we praise you for the ways you show your love to your people. Give us generous and joyful hearts that reflect your goodness to us. Bless these gifts and all who offer them – may they be useful for the work of your church. Amen.

## MADE KNOWN IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD – PASTOR CALEB

Luke 24:13-35

### INTRODUCTION

*"He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread"*

All of us have memorable times of sharing table fellowship. Table fellowship connects us to one another, and when we are open to it, also connects us to God. Some of our most joyful memories are sharing bread with others.

I can bring any number of memories to mind. Sunday afternoon dinner at my grandparents on holidays, where there was an incredible abundance of homecooked fare.

I remember my peers and I as kids skipping to the front of the line at church potlucks. There so many good options that I learned to take just a spoonful helping of very item so that it would all fit on the tray and so that I could manage to eat it all.

I remember the graciousness of hosts in Latin American, proudly offering the best flavor they could provide with the resources they had. In Honduras, hosts would serve one complete plate at a time. As people began to eat, everyone was quiet -- conversation would only resume after people finished eating. I have fond memories of stuffing myself with up to six baleadas -- these were big handmade flour tortillas made with shortening and filled with refried bean, cream, aged cheese, and sometimes egg.

At our family suppers nowadays, we begin by asking saying what we are thankful for. Austin typically points straight at Beth, asking "mommy, what are you thankful for?" Then someone prays, or we sing Johnny Appleseed. Supper is always punctuated with parental intervention to make sure food is actually entering the boys' stomachs, and minimal food is hitting the floor.

I ponder what commonalities connect these diverse memories? Eating is a basic physical function. We have to eat to live. Yet it clearly plays a significance in our lives much beyond physical need.

Sometimes meals even have spiritual significance.

Breaking bread comes up frequently in the Gospel of Luke. We have the many times that Jesus was willing to eat with tax collectors and "sinners."

We have the upside-down missions in which Jesus sent first the 12 and then 70 disciples as vulnerable travelers. These first missionaries carried no provisions, and would have depended on generous table fellowship provided by strangers willing to host them in the towns where they traveled.

We have the story of the five loaves and two fish, which when broken and shared by Jesus turned out to be enough for 5000 people.

We have the prayer Jesus taught, that modeled the petition of just enough bread for today.

We have the last meal Jesus ate with his disciples, in which Jesus broke bread, and offered it as a sign of his soon to be broken body. And then he shared the cup of wine, as a sign of the new covenant in his blood.

The broken bread of the Christian love feast represents Christ's broken body, his love and faithfulness to the kingdom of God so strong that he faced a death sentence as a consequence.

So it is that today we come to another story with a climax around a meal.

For eleven weeks now, we have been stopping over stories of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke as part of our Upside-Down King series.

You might remember that this is the same story that we began with, back in January – two travelers on the road to Emmaus.

They bump into a stranger who joins them for the walk. The stranger asks them about what they've been discussing so intently as they've been walking along. And sadness is written all over their faces as they begin telling him about Jesus, and Jesus' tragic death.

The Upside-Down King musical by Doug and Jude Krehbiel and Carol Duerksen makes this walk to Emmaus the frame story for the rest of the story. The two perplexed travelers retell the whole Jesus story to the stranger that has joined them.

The two disciples acknowledge the reports of the women that Jesus is alive, but don't know what to make of them.

Back in Jesus' day, as is still lamentably the case today sometimes, women's words didn't hold the same weight as men's words.

It is very fitting with the upside-down nature of the Good News, that the very first witnesses of the resurrection are women.

The men don't know what to make of the women's testimony. Maybe it's partly that it's so incredible, and probably also it's the fact that they are women.

This is where the stranger interjects:

Wait a second, you people – you've been missing something big here! "Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" (v. 26, NLT).

So, stranger begins going through the books of Moses and the prophets to reveal what they have to say about the Messiah.

That's where we left off when we looked at the story the last time around, without getting to the end.

#### INVITATION OF THE TRAVELERS

The travelers finally reach the village as the sun begins to set. The stranger is about to continue on his way, but the disciples are too good of Middle-easterners to let him escape without receiving their hospitality.

In this culture, you never accept an offer the first time. Maybe some of you have experienced this. The travelers insist – “Stay the night with us since it's getting late.”

Of course, we might ask: Does this say something about what it means for us to invite Christ to our tables – do we have to insist?

#### RECOGNITION OF JESUS

So they recline at the table, and the moment comes for the stranger to break a loaf of bread and bless it before distributing it.

This is the moment that always captivates me the most in this story. It's only in this moment that the disciples recognize Jesus. I wonder what was different about the risen Jesus that they didn't recognize him sooner.

And what is it about breaking bread that this is the moment that the disciples recognize who the stranger is?

“WERE NOT OUR HEARTS BURNING?”

Jesus suddenly disappears (he never did that before the resurrection, by the way), and after this Cleopas and his companion are left to reflect on the encounter.

*“Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?”*

It's such a striking choice of words. Hearts on fire!

Fire or burning language is a way to talk about deep emotion or excitement, positive or negative.

The prophet Jeremiah complained to God that his heart would just not let him shut up or hold secret the word of God he'd received.

He said, *“If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”* (Jer 20:9)

Within an hour, the narrative says, the disciples return to Jerusalem, no doubt discussing what they've experienced until they meet the Eleven and can compare notes with them.

## THE PATTERN OF JESUS IN THE SCRIPTURES

Wouldn't we love to have actually overheard the conversation of Jesus "opening up the scriptures"?

"The scriptures" here, of course, are not the Bible we currently have in our hands. We most often focus on the New Testament; the last part of the Bible.

"The scriptures" instead refer to what we call the Old Testament. And whatever new way of reading that Jesus opens up, it probably isn't obvious, even to Christian readers of the Old Testament.

In the next passage, Jesus references three parts of the Jewish scriptures: the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms testifying about him.

This is a way of signifying the canon or collection as a whole. Modern Jews call their Bible the tanakh, an acronym for the Torah, Neviim, and Ketuvim, or Law, Prophets, and "Writings."

We have to respect that there is a whole other religion called Judaism that studies these same sets of writings, often focusing on a different set of passages than Christians do. They read them and they just don't see Jesus of Nazareth there. Jewish rabbis and scholars also aren't dumb.

If it was obvious and straightforward, Jesus wouldn't have needed to "open up" the scriptures for the two Emmaus travelers in the first place.

We can have an idea of what this conversation might have been about by noticing the Old Testament passages quoted or referred to in the Gospels or in the writings of the apostle Paul, or even in the writings of early Christians.

Some of the most commonly cited passages include a set of poems in Isaiah about an individual who undergoes great suffering.

Early Christians often focused on the prophecy of swords turned into farm tools in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4.

There are lots of possibilities, but I'll add an idea that is more a lens for reading the Old Testament than prophecy-fulfillment of specific verses.

*I wonder* if the revelation that was opened up was an anticipation of God working through the defeat, rejection, and suffering of the chosen one; that the truest pattern to how God works is not through the powerful, not through the richest, the most famous, the strongest, the wisest, the kings, the successful.

God works through the rejected, the poor, the vulnerable, the marginalized, the oppressed. God works through dishonor more than honor. God creates unexpected reversals.

Of course, God works in many ways, and this pattern is more visible in some parts of the Bible than others. But consider these examples:

God saved a nation from starvation through an imprisoned slave named Joseph.

God used an exiled shepherd to rescue a whole nation of slaves from slavery.

God used charismatic leaders called judges who often from humble origins.

God used a poor foreign young woman named Ruth to save her in-laws estate and create the family line of kings.

God used the prophet Jeremiah to challenge the king and the people, even while Jeremiah was subject to persecution and mistreatment, thrown into an empty cistern.

God's presence and desire for justice was not the most fully revealed when the Israelites had their own sovereignty, their own temple, and their own kings. Rather, they came to understand God's presence, justice, and sovereignty more fully through their experience of exile, as an oppressed people forced to live in a foreign land.

Jesus lived out the same pattern in the most striking way when he boldly ministered to the outcasts, when he played the role of a servant, and painted the picture of God's upside-down kingdom in parables. Jesus' boldness angered and threatened the powerful enough that gave him the lowest, most dishonorable death imaginable.

Our violent culture suffering news of yet another multi-person shooting needs the story of this Jesus. The death of Jesus was not the end of the story, because God raised this Jesus from the grave.

#### ENCOURAGEMENT

Sisters and brothers, the risen Jesus and the power of the resurrection meets us in our place of greatest need.

Whether you feel weak, whether you feel self-assured, whether you feel convicted of sin or feel broken, whether you feel afraid, whether you feel anger, whether you feel grief, whether you feel shame...

Whatever you bring in this moment, the risen Christ comes to you, and breaks bread with us.

The same power that rose Jesus from the grave is available to us. Know that in God's universe, all is well, even if it doesn't seem that way right now.

How do we open ourselves to the presence of Jesus with us? How do we learn to share that faith?

Yesterday, Beth asked our four-year-old Austin who was going to be here today. I think she was expecting him to recall the names of other children. His first answer was "I don't know" and then he exclaimed, "*Jesus is going to be there with his friends!*" Now, he might be disappointed that he didn't see a visible Jesus today, but my guess is he will have no trouble imagining that Jesus is here -- faith is not difficult for children.

In the story of the two traveling disciples, it was the moment when Jesus broke bread that they recognized him. They recognized the presence of Jesus with them in that act of giving and sharing.

There is no question that this moment is the climax of the story -- that moment of recognition of Jesus. The disciples' eyes are opened up to see him, just as Jesus had earlier "opened up" the scriptures for them, and in the next passage "opens up" the mind of the larger group of disciples to understand the scriptures. There's a lot of "opening up" going on. It's like they are closer to divine reality in that moment.

Is it the act of eating together? Is it something about the way that Jesus breaks bread -- maybe they had seen him do this very thing with the five loaves and two fish, or with the bread at the last supper? Does it have something to do with the way that Jesus offered himself in a way that made him vulnerable to the worst death?

One of the reflection questions I leave you with in the bulletin is: how do we open ourselves to recognizing the presence of Christ as the travelers did?

It may be that we are more able to recognize the presence of Christ when we are similarly opening ourselves and offering ourselves to the moment and the people we are with instead of our normal mechanisms of self-protection, maintaining appearances, and controlling outcomes.

It takes receiving bread at Christ's table to allow us to lay down our arms, be they literal or psychological.

This Easter season, rejoice that God is making all things new. God is redeeming, restoring, and resurrecting what was broken or lost.

Go share mealtimes, go do life and share life, with this bold and fearless conviction.

Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed!

#### BENEDICTION

May your eyes be opened to recognize the presence of the risen Christ as you break bread and share life!

May your hearts be set on fire as you discover the pattern of Jesus in the scriptures.

In your fear and in your doubt, may the peace of Christ be with you. Amen!