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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Easter 3, Series A
Saturday, April 29th, 2017
Sunday, April 30th, 2017

Sermon: Breaking Bread
Text: Luke 24:13-35

Focus Statement: Jesus reveals himself in the Word and bread.

Function Statement: That they would recognize Jesus' Real Presence in the Lord's Supper.

Sermon Structure: Story-Framed

Doctrinal Locus: "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink" (SC, The Sacrament of the Altar).

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Mistaken identities and disguises delight audiences when they play at comedy or dramatic effect in stories and plays. Many of you are probably familiar with Mark Twain's famous novel, *The Prince and the Pauper*, in which the young Prince Edward exchanges clothes and trades places with a poor boy his same age of similar height and appearance. A significant amount of hilarity and mischief ensues, but both boys learn a lot about each other's worlds, discovering things they could never know in their proper estate.

One of my favorite scenes in Shakespeare takes place in his historical play, *King Henry V* (Act IV, scene i). On the eve before the Battle of Agincourt, King Henry donned a disguise and walked among his troops as a “commoner” in order to test their courage and see what they really think of their king. Rather than simply trusting the assurances of his sycophantic advisors—men who might only tell him what he wants to hear—King Henry goes about as a simple soldier named “Harry.” What he hears astonishes, surprises, encourages, and even, at times, angers him. But at last he knows what the army’s rank and file are really like, allowing him to serve as even stronger leader as he commands his troops the next day.

Disguises and mistaken identities play a part in the comedy and drama of the Easter story too. Two weeks ago we heard how, after Jesus rose from the dead, Mary Magdalene mistook him for the gardener (John 20)! And in today’s Gospel reading, two of Jesus’ disciples are kept from recognizing their Lord, even as he journeys with them on the way. The distance from Jerusalem to Emmaus was about seven miles (Luke 23:13). I imagine that the ancients were better walkers than we are, used

to footing it around town without automobiles and bicycles. But even if we assume a fairly steady pace of 4 miles per hour, that means they traveled with Jesus for nearly 2 hours without recognizing who he was!

What makes this even more remarkable is the fact that one of these two disciples, Cleopas, may very well have been Jesus' *uncle*! Some early Church historians report that Cleopas may have been a variant spelling of Clopas, who was the brother of Joseph, Jesus' step-father. Thus, Jesus was the stepson of Cleopas's brother, that is, his *nephew*! That Cleopas would not have recognized his own teacher and nephew is quite amazing.

We do not know for certain *why* "their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (Luke 24:16, ESV).¹ Was it trauma, PTSD, or the strange shadows cast by the setting sun? There is no expressed agent for this passive verb. Luke doesn't tell us who or what kept their eyes from seeing Jesus. Your English teacher would tell you this is sloppy writing, while some Bible scholars conjecture that this is an occurrence of the so-

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

called “divine passive.” In other words, if the Bible doesn’t *say* who is doing it, then it must be God!

Regardless of the hows, whys, and wherefores of the matter, the fact is that the Emmaus disciples mistook Jesus for a stranger and a pilgrim come for Passover. They told the stranger of the mighty words and deeds performed by Jesus, whom they called a prophet (but not Messiah!). They recounted his terrible arrest and crucifixion. And they admitted their bewilderment at the reports of the women that Jesus was risen from the dead, yet they couldn’t bring themselves to believe it. All of it was too much and not enough to overcome their desperation and despair at the Master’s death. “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel,” they said (Luke 24:21). But they had no such hope anymore. All of that died with Jesus, who turned out just to be another failed messiah.

But Jesus—still incognito—chided them. “O foolish friends! Why don’t you believe the prophets?! Isn’t this precisely what they said would and *should* happen to the Messiah?” (cf. 24:25-26). And so, Luke tells us, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to

them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

In other words, Jesus drew on the deep well of Old Testament prophecy to prove that suffering, death, and resurrection were always part of God’s plan for the Messiah. From Psalm 16 to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, everything had gone according to plan. And *everything* in Scripture pointed to Jesus! As Martin Luther famously said, “Every page of Scripture bleeds Christ.” The entire Bible is all about *Jesus*! He is the center—and the source—of every God-inspired, life-giving Word.

Even though they didn’t yet realize it, the Emmaus disciples were getting the best Bible study of all time. Christ himself was teaching them everything about himself in the Old Testament Scriptures. And it was all so wonderful to hear, stirring their imagination and rekindling their hope that maybe the things spoken by the women could be true, that they invited Jesus to stay for supper and engage in a little Q&A after his lecture on the road: “Stay with us,” they said, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent” (Luke 24:29). (By the way, these famous words are the inspiration for one of my favorite funeral hymns, “Abide with Me.”)

So Jesus did stay—not for the entire meal, but just long enough to do something extraordinary. As they sat down at the table, “he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them” (Luke 24:30). In other words, Jesus said the meal prayer and gave the bread to them. And in that simple act, the light went on, and they realized it was *Jesus* who had been with them all the time. What was it about the breaking of bread that they recognized Jesus? Was it the words he spoke in his meal prayer? Did he have a favorite ditty, like our little prayer, “Come, Lord Jesus, Be Our Guest”? Or was it the way that he held the bread up in the air as he blessed it? How many times had they seen him do that before? How many times had they shared a meal with him? At the famous feeding of the five thousand, Jesus blessed and broke the loaves and fishes before giving them to his disciples to feed the crowds (Luke 9:16). And even more recently, at the Last Supper in the upper room, just a few days earlier, Jesus “took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me’” (Luke 22:19).

Again, I don't have all the answers, but there was something so special and so significant about the way that Jesus blessed and broke the bread, that it sparked recognition. As Luke tells it, "Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him" (Luke 24:31). (There's that divine passive again!). Yet just as soon as they recognized him, he disappeared and was gone, off and on his way back to Jerusalem for another post-resurrection appearance.

Stunned and startled back into belief, the two disciples looked at each in amazement and exclaimed, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32). And with great joy, they returned to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples that Jesus was alive and "how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:35).

This powerful story readily applies to us because, like the Emmaus road disciples, we do not always recognize Jesus in our life or see what he is doing. After a terrible accident, the death of a loved one, or the loss of a job, it is easy to feel as though God has abandoned us. Like the confounded and disappointed disciples who "*had* hoped" that Jesus

would redeem Israel, we may wonder if God is really with us in the midst of our suffering and sorrow. On the road of life, we walk by faith and not by sight, and yet sometimes even the eyes of faith struggle to recognize the face of Christ in the worst of our circumstances.

Many of you are familiar with the famous “Footprints” poem, in which the poet dreams of Jesus’ footprints in the sand beside her own until she sees only one set of footprints and wonders why Jesus left her. Of course, as we discover, Jesus *never* abandoned her. The times when there was only one set of footprints in the sand were the times when Jesus *carried* her. Nevertheless, she couldn’t understand that on her own. Jesus had to point it out to her, just as he had to open the Scriptures on the road for the Emmaus disciples and break bread with them before they could recognize him.

But no matter how lonely, guilty, lost, or afraid we may feel in life, there are two places where we can always count on finding Jesus: in his Word and Sacraments. Every page of Scripture points us to our Savior because every word of Scripture speaks of Christ (cf. Luke 24:44). As Martin Luther famously said, “Every page of Scripture bleeds Christ.”

And similar to how Jesus revealed himself to the Emmaus disciples in the breaking of bread, so also he gives himself to us in the Lord's Supper. For in Holy Communion, Jesus gives us his very Body and Blood "in, with, and under" the simple bread and wine. Theologians talk about Real Presence in the Lord's Supper. Jesus is *really* present with us when we eat and drink the bread and wine for the forgiveness of our sins.

I don't want to say by this that Jesus celebrated the Eucharist in Emmaus. There is no mention of wine in Luke 24, and not every mention of "breaking bread" necessarily means the Lord's Supper. Although, it is interesting that by the time you get to the Book of Acts, the term breaking bread *clearly* does mean Holy Communion (Acts 2:42, 46). Truly, Jesus is known to us in the breaking of bread (cf. Luke 24:35). To receive the benefit of Jesus' Supper, we need to discern, or recognize, his presence in the bread and wine (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

And so, whenever guilt and shame or doubt and despair assail you, look for Jesus in the places he promises to be: in his Word and Sacraments. Even if Jesus sometimes seems to go undercover, you have

his full and certain promise that he will “never leave you or forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). He is with you on the road! Your journey is his journey too. Indeed, as he promised the apostles, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20b). Jesus is in water and the Word and in the wine and bread. Make no mistake about his identity! Christ is *really* present. Jesus is here *for you*. Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* In the name of the Father and of the Son and of T the Holy Spirit. Amen.