

**Sermon Preached May 4, 2014**  
**Year A, Easter 3**  
**St. John's Episcopal Church**  
**Beverly Farms, Massachusetts**  
**The Rev. Stephanie Chase Bradbury**

I will lift up the cup of salvation \* and call upon the Name of the LORD [Psalm 116:11]. Amen.

A couple are having a drink together in a bar. The man raises his glass and says, "Here's hoping you're in Heaven ten minutes before the devil knows you're dead!" "What does that mean?" asks the girl. "That," answers her date, "is an authentic Irish toast." "Oh. Well, here's to bread, eggs and cinnamon." "What's that?" asked the guy. The girl says, "That's French toast."

Today we are looking at the story about a meal of bread. Emmaus is a town several miles outside Jerusalem. Jesus had been crucified on Friday and now it is Sunday afternoon. Two of his disciples are walking home from Jerusalem to Emmaus after the events of the Passover and crucifixion. One of the disciples is named Cleopas. His companion is never named, and though historically is assumed to be another man, more recent scholarship suggests the companion may have been his wife.

Although it is the day of the resurrection, this couple is despondent. They had been following Jesus for a long time. They were probably there when he was welcomed into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. They were probably there at the Last Supper. They thought he was a prophet, the messiah. They thought that Israel would be saved through him. But instead

Jesus was executed like a common criminal and the couple were heartbroken! And then they had heard crazy stories just that morning that Jesus had risen from the dead, but they left town to walk home before they could get confirmation. Now they are walking along confused, depressed, and talking about everything that they had gone through over the past week. As they are walking along, another traveler joins them. It's Jesus, but for some reason they don't recognize him. Jesus asks them what is going on, they tell him, then he chides them for being discouraged, telling them it was necessary that these things had happened. Then he gives the couple a long talk about Scriptural history and interpretation. When they arrive in the town of Emmaus the couple urges Jesus to come home with them. There they have a meal, and during the meal they suddenly realized who it is they had been speaking to. In other words, it was only after hours of talking, did they recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. What was happening at this meal? Why did a meal trigger knowledge and recognition?

The story on the road to Emmaus is mentioned only in the gospel of Luke. If we look at the whole gospel of Luke as well as the book of Acts, which was written by the same author, we come to realize that there are some common themes taking place around meals.

In looking at the Luke account of the Last Supper, for instance, as Jesus speaks about the bread, he uses four particular verbs. (Lk 22:19), "Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body.'" He took, gave thanks, broke, and gave. Theologians call it the four-fold action of the Eucharist. When you see me or any priest celebrate communion, these same four actions are used.

Compare this to an earlier story of Luke [9:16] – the story of the feeding of 5,000 “And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.” Again, the verbs here are take, blessed, broke, and gave. The story of the multiplying the loaves and fish, and the feeding of the 5,000, is often considered to prefigure the Last Supper.

The same author writes about another meal in Acts 27:35 that happens years later. In it, the Apostle Paul is a prisoner aboard a ship which is lost at sea and with little food. Paul finally urges the sailors to eat, after which they are saved. The passage says, “After [Paul] had said this, he took bread; and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat. Then all of them were encouraged and took food for themselves.” Again, we see these four verbs: took, give thanks, and broke. The fourth verb “gave” is implied when the others are encouraged to eat.

It is very clear that the writer of Luke/Acts is drawing parallels between these meals. When these four actions are used with bread, it is a link with what Jesus was doing at the Last Supper. It is a sign that the same kind of thing is happening again... that these are communion meals.

So now taking this knowledge with us to the couple who have just invited Jesus to dinner with them in Emmaus, we read about this meal, [Luke 24:30] “When [Jesus] was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.” Again, the same four-fold action: took, blessed, broke, and gave. Luke is saying this Emmaus supper is

communion. In fact it is the first post-resurrection Eucharist. The first thing Jesus does after the resurrection is celebrate communion with two of his disciples. Remember, this is Sunday night. He just resurrected that morning. The last supper had just happened Thursday, three days before. It's still fresh in their minds.

So back to our earlier question. Why did a meal trigger knowledge and recognition? Because when we celebrate communion, [Jesus] is made known to us in the breaking of the bread.

Yesterday I was delighted to be a presenter for the confirmation of 15 young people from St. John's. They did the church proud. Two and a half hour service, blue blazers and white dresses wedged eight to a pew, each of them reverently knelt before Bishop Gayle who hands laid on them. Confirmation, as you know, is the confirming of our baptism vows. It is saying, "Yes, I assent to what happened to me at my baptism." One of these vows, is "Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?" and everyone answers, "I will, with God's help." We vow to continue in the breaking of bread, in participating in communion.

Because it there in communion, in the bread and wine, that we see God, that we recognize Christ. How is that?

1) We see Jesus in the change in our lives. Jesus' body was broken on the cross, so too is the bread at the table. Yet Jesus' resurrection is to wholeness, and so too when we eat of the body, what is broken in us is healed and made whole. It gives us spiritual strength for the journey.

2) We see Jesus in each other. Bread creates community. We gather weekly and eat a meal together. Through our shared meal, we become brothers and sisters.

3) We see Jesus through the work we do in his name. Communion is our weekly renewal of our baptism vows. It is our way of saying “yes, I am part of the Body of Christ.” And so we are Christ’s hands and feet, caring for the world in his name. As Jesus did, we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and free the oppressed.

Why did a meal trigger knowledge and recognition for the couple walking to Emmaus? Because we know through communion 1) We see Jesus in the change in our lives. 2) We see Jesus in each other. 3) We see Jesus through the work we do in his name. Cleopas and his wife recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread, and so too do we.

We may all have our Roads to Emmaus - days when we are hopeless and feel we have been abandoned by God. We may not know Jesus is there, we cannot see him, but he is with us just the same. And like the couple in Emmaus, we are assured that when we celebrate communion, when we are in church, gathered around the altar, we CAN see him – in the bread, in the wine, in the people kneeling around us. We are not alone. We are not without hope. Jesus is known to us in the breaking of the bread.

Amen.

**Not Used:**

Cleopas is not mentioned in any other part of scripture, however, in John 19, during the crucifixion it says, “Standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.” Assuming that “Cleopas” and “Clopas” are the same person, which is quite possible, then we know that this person both A) has a wife Mary who is a disciple present at the crucifixion, and B) that he lives in, and is walking home to, the same town as a another disciple, it is likely that this disciple companion is his wife Mary.