

“On the Road to Emmaus”

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First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

Sunday, April 30, 2017
Third Sunday of Easter
Music Appreciation Sunday

Readings from Scripture: Luke 24:13-23 and Luke 24:24-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking 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. And Jesus 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?’ They replied, ‘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.

Luke 24:13-23

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. Then Jesus said to them, ‘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 all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, Jesus 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.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed the bread and broke the bread, and gave the bread 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 Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Luke 24:24-35

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations and our faith to you and to the power of your Holy Spirit. I pray that you would take all that we carry within, the words that we've offered in song and in prayer, the words that we've heard read from the Gospel of Luke and the words that you have laid upon my heart this morning to share. Touch, bless and transform all of these into the living word, the word of Jesus Christ our Lord. And let that word do its work within us, among us and through us that we might be the people of God, that we might be the body of Christ, that we might carry on the mission and ministry that you give us all to do through acts of kindness and words of grace. We ask this in the faithful name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

Soon Karen will take this bread and may or may not say something like, *On the night that Jesus was arrested, he gathered with friends, and while he was at supper with them, he took bread, blessed it and broke it and said, 'this is my body broken for you. Take and eat.'* Not having grown up in the church, I came to the faith while at a Jesuit university. I went as a nonbeliever and through a series of dreams and awakening to the faith, I found myself being baptized as a Roman Catholic. I recall every Sunday night going to chapel where we would, at one point, line up in order to go forward to receive the communion host, to take the bread that through the words of the priest had become the body and the cup which through the words of the priest had become the blood of Christ, to come forward and to receive the elements. I remember the friend who taught me how to stand with my hands behind my back and lean my head forward and stick out my tongue the right way. I won't do that right now. There is a certain way because you're not supposed to touch the body and blood of Christ because you are a sinner. You are unclean and unworthy and this is God's amazingly special gift to you so you better do so in reverence. This is my body broken for you.

I remember while getting my doctor of ministry degree, during a weekend break, I decided to go to a monastery. It was a Trappist monastery, which means they get up at like 3:30 in the dark to gather together to pray in the chapel. It was a long, skinny chapel and up in the front was the gold plated cabinet with the locked door and the cross above it. In the middle part was where the choir was, where the monks sat. They sat facing each other and I had the privilege of sitting with them. Then back further were the pews, behind a little bit of a rail where the common folk lived, so to speak. And back behind that, between the pews and the door was another rail with a fence across the aisle. And at 3:30 in the morning I saw a family on their knees at that fence. And I thought to myself, *you have got to be kidding me*, through eyes half opened and still half asleep.

So later that day I went back there because I was so intrigued that people of faith would gather at 3:30 and be so far away from the sacred elements and definitely not anywhere near the choir where I had the privilege of sitting with the monks. They were way back behind a closed fence. I went back and I read on the top of the fence the little placard that was there. It said, "Please be quiet. Do not disturb the worship of the monks." I went back to my room and I packed up my things and I've never been to a monastery since, which breaks my heart because I find myself somewhat of a contemplative. But the idea that our tradition could speak so loudly to how unworthy and distant you might be in your moment of need, at a time 3:30 in the morning people are on their knees. They need something if they're showing up at 3:30 out in the middle of nowhere and they're on their knees. What our tradition told them was that what was up here was so special that they couldn't touch it, or disturb it or bother it.

Some of you have probably been to churches where there is a fence around here, or a rail they call it, with padded things that are on the outside so you can come and get down on your knees and fold your hands and guess what? Stick out your tongue, right? Our tradition says that if you're

not baptized, you are not supposed to touch the stuff. That somehow this bread, the body of Christ, is the most important thing about communion or the Lord's Supper. I've wondered a lot about that this week, if that's what Jesus was trying to get us to understand.

A couple weeks ago I went to visit one of you in the hospital—you were at St. Luke's—and afterwards, I don't usually go this way, but I decided to drive home on Highway 64. So I got onto 64 and we're kind of flying down the road and all of a sudden, all the cars in front of me started to slow down and so I slowed down, and boom! The next thing I'm aware of is my car telling me, “crash detected, calling Honda assist.” And I go, what? And then I look in the mirror and there is a Dodge pickup truck, a diesel, big one, inside my CRV. And I'm thinking like what? So long story short, I go see the doctor because my back is screaming at me and she gives me all kind of little colored tablets to take and sends me to PT at the Brain and Spine Institute at St. Luke's. I get the clinical director who is a doctor of physical therapy, a graduate of Wash. U., a young Catholic woman who I think really knows her stuff. I'm lying on the table and she is hooking up electrodes and—did I tell you earlier that I kind of like the contemplative side of things? I tend to be kind of quiet most of the time in my life. She is an extrovert. She likes to talk and tell stories. She found out I was a pastor and she's Roman Catholic, and she's got two little boys and one of them is in third grade and he is dying to become an altar boy. He's so excited that there is a shortage of altar boys in their parish, so they changed the rule from fourth grade to third grade, so he's taking classes and he's learning what all that stuff is called and where to set it and how to touch it and what not to do and all that stuff. She said, 'It's so amazing.’ So I took him to Catholic Supply with me to get a present for my niece for her christening. We're walking down the aisle and I'm in front of him and I walked by the communion section, where they've got all the little wafers lined up and the big wafer that the priest holds up and breaks, called the host. She said, “I just walked right by them and all of a sudden I hear my son say, 'Mom. Look. Jesus is in a bag!’”

Brothers and sisters, I'm convinced that when Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to these unsuspecting disciples, he was not saying “THIS IS MY BODY, BROKEN”. He was doing what good people in his culture did all the time. He was taking bread, blessing it, and breaking it and saying to them as he says to us every time we share this meal, he is saying to them and to us, “I love you, you are welcome, you belong and God is with you and feeding you and paying attention to you.” So I've spent this week wondering if for 2000 years maybe we've gotten it wrong. Amen.