

## **They Knew Him in the Breaking of the Bread (Luke 24:35)**

A sermon for the third Sunday of Easter

What do we talk about when we get together?

The weather, for sure. And gas prices and grocery prices. We talk about unusual accidents or happenings around town and the wider world. We avoid politics and religion, except when we are among like-minded friends. For the most part we talk about things that are important to us, that affect us.

When we have particularly good news to share, we are like that woman in the parable in Luke 15, who, when she found the lost coin she had lost, called together her friends and neighbors and said (15:9): "Rejoice with me for I had found the coin which I had lost!"

As Luke 6:45 says: "What the heart is full of, the mouth overflows with."

Two weeks ago we celebrated Easter. How many of us have talked to anyone about the resurrection? How many of us have even thought about it? This which is the keystone of the whole. The critical, major, only event that changes everything! The resurrection is far bigger than winning the lottery, or uncovering buried treasure.

We drift along about the center of our Christian faith when what it is really like is finding a treasure in the field. And suddenly everything is different. Or we like a child who, presented with a shiny toy in one hand and a \$100,000,000 uncut diamond that looks like a stone in the other hand, chooses the shiny toy. We are like that child. It is time to grow up. Time to wake up. The kingdom to come is more important than colored eggs and chocolate bunnies. The kingdom to come is more important than all the worries and troubles of the day. Everything is different because of the resurrection.

Luke 24 tells the story of the two men, who the same day as the resurrection set out to walk to Emmaus, a little town about seven miles from Jerusalem. As they are walking, a stranger comes up next to them and asks: What are you talking about? They answer: You must be the only one who does not know. And they tell him about Jesus of Nazareth and how he was crucified and how the women went to the tomb and found it empty, and how an angel told them that he was no longer dead, but alive.

Then this unknown stranger, beginning with Moses and the prophets, began interpreting scripture, showing them how it all points to him. As they came to the end of the day, they asked him to stay with them and he did. As they began the evening meal, he took charge and broke the bread and handed out the cup of wine, and their eyes were opened and they recognized him (Luke 24:31). They knew him in the breaking of the bread. And he vanished.

How did they know him? Luke 24:16 says that as he joined them on the road to Emmaus, they did not know him because "their eyes were kept from recognizing him." This text is like Acts 10:40-41: "God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." He only appeared to those who were chosen by God. So this is not some normal kind of event.

Luke 24:32 says the two men said to each other: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he opened to us the scriptures? Is this what it is all about? Something that induces a stirring of one's heart? To have a certain feeling? A religious experience?"

Some years ago there was a well-known preacher with movie-star looks and a dramatic flair. His big congregation was packed to the rafters every Sunday. He was a superstar in the church, as preachers go. And he made that verse: "Their hearts burned within them," the key to the whole text. What a mistake!

Yes, the text says that, but that is not what it is about. There are many experiences in life that cause our hearts to burn within us. A new child is born. A graduation ceremony. A beautiful song. A morning sunrise. A mountain vista. Many experiences in life cause our hearts to burn within us. Yet, when it comes to sin and salvation, we know that feelings and experiences are not what it is all about. As Paul reminds us in 2 Cor 11:14: "Even the devil can disguise himself as an angel of light."

What then did the two travelers on the road to Emmaus do? The text says they got up, returned to Jerusalem, found the eleven disciples and others, and told them the good news about "how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread" (24:31, 35).

They knew him in "the breaking of the bread." That is a technical phrase, "the breaking of the bread." That means **he took charge**. He presided, as he always does when his word and sacraments are given. And he gave them himself. This is my body. This is my blood. And then they knew him.

1 Peter 1:23-25: "You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through **the living and abiding word of God**. That word is **the good news** which was preached to you."

1 Thess 2:9-13: "For you remember our labor and toil, brethren; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you **the gospel of God**. . . . And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received **the word of God** which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, **the word of God**, which is at work in you believers."

Romans 10:17: "So faith comes from what is **heard**, and what is **heard** comes by **the preaching of Christ**."

We, too, have been born again through this word, the word of the gospel that he is the one who is presiding and giving us life, and continues to do so. It is really the same as in John 6:51: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."

And therefore we sing here and out there on roads we travel; at times we sing softly, and other times at the top of our lungs, to friends and strangers:

Thine is the glory, Risen, conqu'ring Son;  
Endless is the vict'ry Thou o'er death hast won!

Amen