

P Christ is risen!
C He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today our Gospel text along with our worship itself puts us in conversation with Cleopas and a stranger who has joined with us on a road to Emmaus. Fredrick Buechner an American writer and theologian interpreted Emmaus as that place we go to escape the world. Emmaus is the place we go to when we throw our hands up in defeat and say, "I'm outta here!" Buechner views Emmaus as that place we go to make sense of a world that holds nothing sacred.¹ And if we broaden our view about this journey, we engage in with our worship today, we can conclude that it is a journey from denial to recognition, from ignorance to knowledge, or even hopelessness to grace and life.

Today our worship-journey begins with an invocation of the Triune God that begins a conversation that takes us from our ignorance and oblivion to the recognition of Jesus Christ among us. Within our liturgical conversation today, may we see that our doubts and our assumptions about this journey and its travelers are overcome with the reality that without our hindsight, and for some, even with it, we are just as oblivious as Cleopas in our journey with Jesus Christ.

Look around the sanctuary right now...do you see Jesus? Do you recognize Jesus? He's here...if you can't see him can we say our sight is *also* restrained...or can we conclude then that we just don't know what we are looking for? We proclaim throughout our Eastertide that Christ is risen, undeniably, definitely risen...so where is He now and how do we recognize Jesus?

This is the million-dollar question that confronts the church every Easter, how do we approach the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day after his Crucifixion and what do we say about it? What can we say about it...other than...*Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* Is this just an expression that we say like, "How-ya-doin'?" It's a question that is not really a question but more of a statement of greeting or salutation that we really don't want to know how that person is doing...its just something we say. Nonetheless, Christ is risen, so, how do we recognize the risen Christ?

On Easter Sunday morning we heard that Mary recognized Jesus when he spoke her name. Last week we heard that Thomas recognizes Jesus in his doubt. Today, Cleopas and the other disciple recognize Jesus in their doubt when they break bread together.

Irony of ironies, Cleopas actually says to Jesus, the One who is crucified and risen, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" (Luke 24:18b) I can just see the Jesus I conjure up in mind, rolling his eyes and saying, "Sorry guys, I was on spring-break, surfing in Hawaii...sorry I missed it." I think we all conclude that Cleopas is a real knucklehead, however, this is why the other disciple is unnamed, because we can place ourselves in this conversation taking place on the road to Emmaus with Cleopas and say, yes, I am a knucklehead too because I don't recognize him either. How do we,

¹ Buechner, Fredrick, *The Magnificent Defeat*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1966. Page 84.

who have come to believe, even though we have not seen Him, how is it that we believe and how do we recognize Jesus now?

Aristotle, an Ancient Greek philosopher considered to be one of the greatest thinkers in politics, psychology and ethics, who lived some 400 years before Christ claims that *recognition* is a change from ignorance to knowledge and this recognition changes the fates of the people involved for good or ill.² And within our Gospel lesson today we have a story about a conversation that takes place during a journey...a journey from ignorance to knowledge...from obliviousness to recognition...a conversation that changes the fate for all people who engage in that conversation.

I think its safe to say that we can very easily determine that all of us gathered here today along with the travelers to Emmaus recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. But there is more than *just* breaking bread. There is more because if that is all we conclude about the recognition of Jesus then our eyes continue to be restrained. If not, then we can say that Jesus is in every bread isle of the grocery store. The very structure of this story and the conversation that takes place within it shows us that our recognition of Jesus is much more than just bread.

Our recognition begins in this conversation that takes place between the unknown disciple, Cleopas, and the one who joins them on the road. Conversation with Jesus continues to take place for our recognition today...right now in our worship together. Our conversation with Jesus is our four-part liturgical order that contains the same four parts of this journey within the Gospel text: the gathering, the word, the meal, and the sending.

In this Gospel text presented to us today we hear that Jesus joins Cleopas and the unnamed traveler and walks with them...and in this is the first part of worship, the gathering. And as they talk together, they talk of the prophets, Moses, and the suffering and the glory of the Messiah and how scripture interprets Jesus for them...this would be equivalent to the word section of worship. Within the “word” portion of our worship, we believe that we “encounter the living Word, Jesus Christ³ just as Cleopas and the unnamed disciple encounter the living Word Jesus Christ, literally and through the conversation that takes place among them.

And of course, we hear of the revelation of Jesus in the breaking of the bread, the meal...the Holy Meal we all share. Then they get up and return to Jerusalem saying the Lord has risen indeed. They go and share the good news of Jesus Christ. Cleopas and the other disciple go as we are sent at the close of our time together, they go in peace and they serve the Lord. Then they depart and serve by sharing what they have heard and have experienced of the Good News in the presence of Christ...that Christ is risen indeed.

And that conversation continues within this gathering...within our recognition that comes as the conversation continues. If we say we recognize Jesus like the travelers solely in the breaking of the bread then once again we restrain our recognition. Jesus does not just break bread. As the travelers invite Jesus to stay with them we hear that:

² Baird, Forrest E. and Walter Kaufmann. *Ancient Philosophy Second Edition, Philosophic Classics Volume 1*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994. A summary statement distilled from his writings named after his son on the nature of good and of moral and intellectual virtues entitled *Nicomachean Ethics, Book IV* pages 411 – 424.

³ *With One Voice, A Lutheran Resource for Worship*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. Pages, 8-9.

³⁰ When Jesus was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ *THEN* their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. (Luke 24:30-31)

Jesus does NOT just break bread, he takes it, he blesses it, he then breaks it, and gives it. With Jesus blessing this bread, He institutes the meal as Holy, he establishes with his Words, His presence to make this meal Holy. As Luther points out and we confess as a Lutheran Church that:

“This command and institution of (*Jesus*) has the power to accomplish this, that we do not distribute and receive simply bread and wine but his body and blood, as his words indicate: ‘This is my body, this is my blood.’ So it is not our work or speaking but the command and ordinance of Christ that make the bread the body and the wine the blood, beginning with the first Lord’s Supper and continuing to the end of the world, and it is administered daily through our ministry or office.”⁴

In other words, the words are just as important as the broken bread. Within the very words that institute our Holy Meal at this table that we gather around we see through the verbs that the giving of his body and blood, or the RECOGNITION of Jesus *continues* right now during our worship and will continue as bread is broken again.

Looking then at the verbs that institute the presence of Jesus in the breaking of the bread we see that they too are like the verbs throughout the conversation that is taking place on the road to Emmaus. All the verbs in this conversation between Jesus, Cleopas, and the unnamed disciples are imperfect, indicating a past action, an action in progress but not completed, a continuous action, or a conversation that continues today not only in the breaking of the bread, but in our liturgical structure as well. In other words, we are that unnamed disciple traveling with Cleopas and with Jesus and our worship is our continued conversation with Jesus Christ.

I return to Buechner who said that Emmaus is that place we go to make sense of things. Here today we have gathered in our Emmaus...St. Paul Lutheran Church, here is where the conversation with Jesus continues in His very presence. Here in this place Jesus joins us all in this conversation that is our worship and He is revealed in this worship and in this Holy Meal and our fate is changed.

As Lutheran’s we confess this about this Holy Meal and all who have gathered around it:

The true and worthy guests, for whom this precious sacrament above all was instituted and established, are the Christians who are weak in faith, fragile and troubled, who are terrified in their hearts by the immensity and number of their sins and think that they are not worthy of this precious treasure and of the benefits of Christ because of their great impurity, who feel the weakness of their faith and deplore it, and who desire with all their heart to serve God with a stronger, more resolute faith and purer obedience. As Christ says, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” [Matt. 11:28*], and, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” [Matt. 9:12*]. “God’s power is made mighty in

⁴ Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P.. *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VII, Holy Supper. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000. Page 607, par 77.

the weak” [2 Cor. 12:9*],²⁰⁶ and Romans 14[:1*, 3*], “Welcome those who are weak in faith ... for God has welcomed them.” For “whoever believes in the Son of God,” whether weak or strong in faith, “has eternal life” [John 3:16*].⁵

Today we are able to recognize Jesus Christ in our doubt, in our struggles, in our sin, and joins us and walks with us in our fragile and troubled lives because of the conversation we have been invited into by the very grace and mercy of God. God is present with us in Jesus Christ who is revealed to us through the practices and rituals of this very worship service...in the proclaimed Word and in the Sacraments of bread, wine, and water.

Today is a special conversation that is taking place because two more souls join in our conversation with God, Keiran Elizabeth, and Heidi Peach. Their conversation with the Lord begins this day and in the days ahead we pray that they too will recognize the grace, the mercy, and the life we are all part of through Jesus Christ. Christ is present with us because Christ is risen, He is risen indeed...alleluia...

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁵ Ibid. Pages 605-606, par. 69-70.