

20 April 2025
“Meals with Jesus”

In the Breaking of the Bread
Luke 24:13-35

We read together from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 24, verses 13-24:

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then 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?’ ¹⁹He 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, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But 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. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and 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. ²⁴Some 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.’

You know, it would have been nice if Jesus had just made himself a little clearer. Here he rises from the dead, meets two people who already know him, who are eager to believe in him, who have even heard the first rumors that he might have risen from the dead, but . . . How does Luke put it? . . . “Their eyes were held back from recognizing him.” Why? What’s with all this obfuscation? Why hide the most important miracle in history?

It is, you know. This is the clincher. This is the hinge that Christianity hangs on. Without the resurrection, we’re a service club with more music. So, it would seem important to make that central event clear, wouldn’t you say? Here’s how it should have happened. Jesus should have blown the door off that tomb with a huge explosion, then stepped through the swirling smoke and stood in the open doorway. And there should have been crowds there to see it: crowds that included prominent men and women, Roman writers, recognized scientists, philosophers and opinion-makers. You know, *influencers*. Oh, and Pilate and the Jewish religious leaders who had sent him up should have been there, too. Then they would have all had to admit that Jesus had risen, and these people who are *not* followers of Christ would have recorded that fact in writings that today would constitute independent verification of our miracle. Wouldn’t that be great? Then we could take those writings to Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris and all the other so-called “New Atheists” and tell them to stuff it. “How do you explain this?” we’d say. That would be so satisfying! We Christians would have a proven, empirically verified, historically confirmed center for our faith, and everybody would *have* to believe us. But, again, that’s not what happened. Nobody saw Jesus rise, and even when people who knew him saw him after he had risen, their eyes did not recognize him. In fact, it sounds as if he didn’t even *want* them to.

We now read Luke 24:25-29.

²⁵Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!’ ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things

and then enter into his glory?’²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on.²⁹But 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.

So Jesus is walking with these two old friends who do not recognize him, and instead of offering empirical evidence, Jesus starts preaching. From the Old Testament, of course. He goes back through the law of Moses and the words of the Hebrew Prophets, showing them how the God that is described in the Hebrew Bible is not actually fulfilled by a conqueror messiah, as everyone was expecting, but by a messiah who would die and then rise again. He explains to these two the radically unexpected nature of God’s salvation – that it is not about restoring the Jewish monarchy or reclaiming the Promised Land, but about restoring the human soul and renewing all of earth and heaven. It was a great sermon. The two disciples hung on every word. So, when they reach Emmaus, and Jesus starts to walk on by, they invite him to stay for dinner. But they *still* haven’t recognized him. All that preaching, all that theologizing, all that sound doctrinal explanation, and they still don’t know him.

We conclude with Luke 24:30-35.

³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.³²They 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?’³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.³⁴They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Then it happens. They sit down around the table to eat together. Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and hands it around. *Then* they know him. Then they recognize him. Then their eyes are opened. And Jesus disappears. I’m not sure I understand that detail – it’s as if Jesus is saying, “Now that you know me, you don’t need to see me.” Whether he’s saying that or not, though, that seems to be the case. Jesus disappears, and the disciples don’t seem to mind. Instead, they start putting all the other evidence in place: “Were not our hearts burning while he talked to us?” Now that they know him, everything else fits together perfectly. But they didn’t know him by means of physical evidence or by means of good preaching.

One more time. The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead is the central truth of our faith and of the entire salvation history of God’s creation. And I do not use that word “truth” lightly. Christ is Risen, and that is *the* Truth. But the truth I speak of is not scientific truth, based on measurable data and observable phenomena. There are those for whom that is the only valid sort of truth. These people are not interested in any truth that cannot be tested scientifically, measured in the laboratory, verified by physical evidence. I am sorry for those people; their lives and minds seem to me to be tragically limited. There are even some Christians who think this way. Every generation there seems to be a new Christian writer – Josh MacDowell, Lee Strobel – someone who sets out to prove Christ’s resurrection *scientifically*. These are very clever men, and their books are very popular, and they invariably convince everyone who already agrees with them that they are right, but that’s pretty much it. Worse, insofar as these writers also seem to

assume that only scientific truth counts, their minds are just as limited as the Atheists'. Remember, Jesus didn't *want* to be recognized by means of physical evidence.

Nor is the truth I speak of theological or doctrinal truth. Again, there are those for whom this is the primary sort of truth, the truth before which every other sort must take a back seat. This is what my church or my interpretation of the Bible says, and that's all that matters. Now I'm not opposed to doctrine, much. Solid teaching is very useful. Even Jesus did it, remember? But remember also that the disciples did not know the Risen Christ through teaching; instead, they began to truly appreciate his teaching after they recognized him. A lesson here for us preachers: what we do on Sunday mornings up here is not a bad thing, much. But this is not how people come to know the Risen Christ.

Neither through science nor theology can we recognize the truth of the Resurrection. How do we recognize the Risen Christ? How did the disciples in Luke? Through the breaking of the bread. It was when Jesus ate with them, sat at the table with them, prayed over the meal, then shared their food that their eyes were opened. We know Christ through the breaking of the bread. And I'm not just getting all high church and talking about the sacrament of Communion here. I'm talking about what every meal represents. I'm talking about all the meals that Jesus shared with us through his ministry – eating with the hungry, with the outcast, with the despised, with the pious, with his friends. We know Christ through relationship – no, that's too tame, too clinical. We recognize Christ when we are loved. We grow to know Christ when we love others. That's what breaking bread together means. It is a love feast. When we love across every boundary, over every wall, in spite of every limit set by the dry dictates of science and doctrine, then we will begin to recognize Christ. And others will recognize the Risen Christ in us.

In the breaking of the bread.