



ZUMBRO
LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sunday, April 19, 2020

Jesus Comes In a Word and Meal
Pastor Jason Bryan-Wegner

Easter Sermon
Series: *We're All in This Together*

Luke 24:13-35 NRSV

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." 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. 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.

Sara Miles didn't grow up going to church. She didn't identify as a Christian at all, and was not interested in becoming one. One winter day, while on a walk in her neighborhood in San Francisco she walked past St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, like she had on many neighborhood walks. But this time she stopped and for no known reason, turned onto the sidewalk that led to the church, and she walked in. As her curiosity led her deeper into the church, she soon realized that a small service was happening.



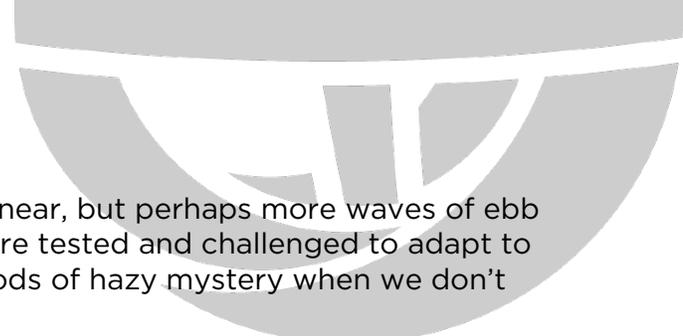
Gathered in a circle of chairs about 20 people were seated in silence. Sara tried her best not to catch any one's eye, and quietly found a seat herself. Soon two people robed in long gowns started chanting in harmony and the people gathered started to sing too. Sara, not knowing what she was doing or how she'd really gotten there, surprisingly started to sing as well. At first, she thought it was ridiculous, but it didn't stop her. After singing and standing, and sitting, and listening and singing some more; there was an invitation to come forward. But it wasn't an altar call. At least not that kind of altar call.

The small group made their way to a table near the front of the open sanctuary space; and she heard this invitation, "Jesus invites everyone to his table." And before she knew what was happening next someone was pressing a fresh crumbly piece of bread in her hands, saying, "The body of Christ" and then someone handed her a goblet and said, "The blood of Christ." And then as she writes in her book, *Take This Bread*, "something outrageous and terrifying happened. Jesus happened to me. I still can't explain my first communion", she writes. "It made no sense. I was in tears and physically unbalanced: I felt as if I had just stepped off a curb and been knocked over, painlessly from behind. The disconnect between what I thought was happening - I was eating a piece of bread; what I heard someone else say was happening - the piece of bread was the "body" of Christ, a patently untrue or at best metaphorical statement; and what I *knew* was happening - God, named Christ or Jesus was real and in my mouth - It all utterly short-circuited my ability to do anything but cry."

For most of us, like Sarah, communion is a deeply personal thing. We feel the connection between us and God as we eat and drink. We taste and see that the Lord is indeed good. Yet, communion is more than a personal connection to Jesus. It is a communion with one another, with God, and with all creation. One of my favorite Eucharistic prayers in the liturgy of communion speaks to that reality. "Blessed are you, O God of the universe. Your mercy is everlasting, and your faithfulness endures from age to age. Praise to you for creating the heavens and the earth. Praise to you for saving the earth from the waters of the flood. Praise to you for bringing the Israelites safely through the sea. Praise to you for leading your people through the wilderness to the land of milk and honey. Praise to you for words and deeds of Jesus, your anointed one. Praise to you for the death and resurrection of Christ. Praise to you for your Spirit poured out on all nations..." You see, in partaking in communion, we remember the history of grace and salvation that Jesus is tied to throughout all of Scripture, and that by faith we become part of that same salvation story.

There were not tears reported the evening two of Jesus' heart-broken disciples walked along the road and eventually sat at a table with the Lord sharing fears and dashed dreams over a meal. But there was heartburn and revelation and transformation as Jesus recounted these same stories of God's creative and redeeming work throughout Scripture. The flee from Egypt and God's providence in the wilderness, the words of the prophets who held on to hope and faith and the Living God while others ignored and denied God's presence. And slowly over the evening these disciples started to move - from doubt and fear to confusion and mystery to full-bodied faith and life.





Isn't this the journey of faith we are all on? It's not linear, but perhaps more waves of ebb and flow - from times of fear and doubt, when we are tested and challenged to adapt to new norms and unforeseen circumstances - to periods of hazy mystery when we don't have answers, but are

patient enough to see what happens next - and by God's grace and the Spirit's will, we move to full-sight when we see in right perspective that the love and grace of God has sustained and supported us, and called us in to deeper being all along.

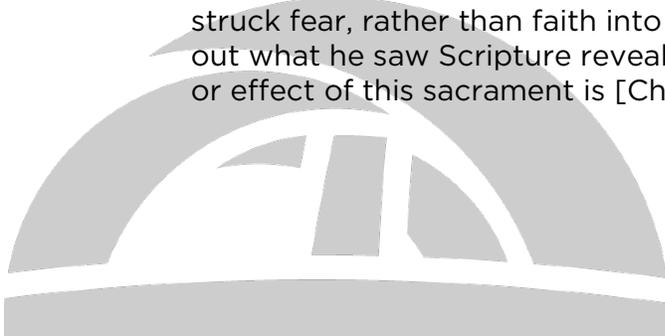
That's what happens when Jesus comes near - life happens and trust happens, forgiveness and love happen, and God's divine mystery is revealed and shared with others. It's nothing short of a miracle.

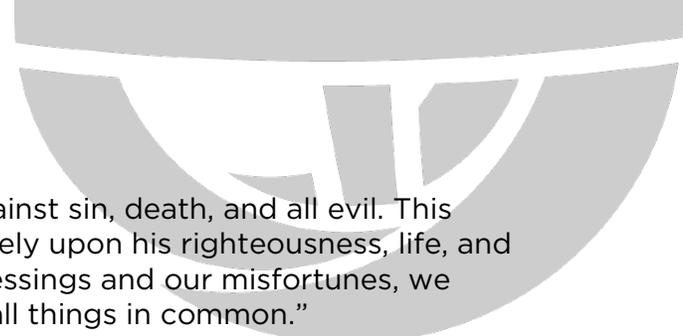
One of the primary faith mentors in my life was my grandpa Allan. He was the one who taught me to pray when I stayed the night with my grandparents while my mom worked nights. He was the one who I sat next to in church when we visited, and I could only hope when I grew up to sing hymns so boldly (if you ask my kids I think they'll tell you I've accomplished this goal). Though aside from recited prayers and attendance at worship my grandpa didn't really talk about his faith. Maybe you can relate? It's not really in our Lutheran wheelhouse to speak too openly about Jesus. Though perhaps it may do us some good.

Shortly after I became a pastor, my grandpa had become quite ill. He hadn't been able to leave the house and certainly didn't get to church. Erica and I had come to visit and my grandpa said, "You know, I haven't been able to get to church in a long time, and I haven't had communion in about six months. Do you suppose we could have communion tonight?" I'll be honest, I didn't know that it meant so much to him, but I was grateful he asked. I had to go the liquor store because my grandparents rarely had wine in their house. And after dinner, I went to the kitchen and grabbed a couple slices of bread and poured a few small glasses of wine. We read this passage of Scripture from Luke about how Jesus meets us in our disappointments and our fears, and then I offered the words of institution and we shared communion. As I offered the words, "Grandpa, this is the body of Christ given for you, this is the Blood of Christ shed for you" tears welled up in both of our eyes. Jesus was near. It was nothing short of grace and life and miracle.

Maybe you haven't had the mind-bending, heart-burning experience of Sara Miles or the disciples, but we have caught glimpses of revelation, we have felt the nearness of Christ, maybe more muted and faintly than others. We've tasted something of the power and grace of Jesus in our sharing of life with each other. That's what's so hard about being apart during this time of pandemic. But in the mystery of faith and the sacrament, Jesus' grace and mercy are still available to us through God's Word and a meal.

Five hundred years ago, Martin Luther was a young monk and theologian. In 1519, when the church was concerned with who received the wine at communion (yes, for a long time only the priests drank the wine) and they made up rules about the sacrament that struck fear, rather than faith into the hearts of the faithful, Luther wrote a letter laying out what he saw Scripture revealed about Holy Communion. He wrote, "The significance or effect of this sacrament is [Christ's] fellowship with all the [faithful]...Christ, by his





love, takes upon himself our form, fights with us against sin, death, and all evil. This enkindles in us such love that we take on his form, rely upon his righteousness, life, and blessedness. And through the interchange of his blessings and our misfortunes, we become one bread, one body, one drink, and have all things in common.”

Today we will celebrate holy Communion even while remaining in our homes. Many theological discussions and deliberations have taken place over the last several weeks about whether or not communing while streaming worship is theologically appropriate. Pastors and theologians have split hairs over how we interpret the terms communion or fellowship. I can see the arguments for both abstaining and communing. Ultimately though, I lean on the mystery of the sacrament itself being both bread and wine and Christ’s body and blood; on our Lutheran theology, and on the tradition of reformation Luther started by employing the latest technology of his time to proclaim and participate in the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ.

We commune together this week by faith, just as we do with anything when we gather as God’s people. By faith, we trust that Jesus is truly present with each of us and with all of us in the bread and the wine and that Jesus’ life sustains us and all creation. We do not know what Coronavirus will eventually do, or how it will play out, or when it will end. But we can trust with all of our hearts that in the midst of it feeling like so much is broken, in a time when so many people are hurting, when so many people are sacrificing, and so many people are putting their lives on the line to help others endure this disease, that Jesus is with us. Jesus is suffering in and for us and that when we receive this meal that Jesus binds our lives to his.

This revelation may come to you as a bolt of lightning, like it did for Sara Miles, or it may come to us in the subtlety of a ritual that is all too familiar to many of us. However, Jesus comes to you in the breaking of the bread, may it and may he be the life that gives you life, and the hope which you seek. Amen.

