



April 30 – Third Sunday of Easter
“In Breaking Bread –
They Recognized Him”
Rev. Dr. Scott Landis
Luke 24:13-35 – The Message

The Atlanta Falcon’s locker room following Superbowl 51. Hillary Clinton’s campaign headquarters early on November 9th. The quiet office after a pink slip is found on the desk. The delivery room after a long-anticipated first child is born still. Each very different in specifics, but each carrying a momentary – or perhaps life-long, insurmountable feeling of grief and bitter disappointment – a feeling that seems to overtake anything else going on in one’s life.

It’s where we find Cleopas and his companion as they walk away from the place they hoped would be the sacred center for the One who would change everything. They had poured their whole lives into that hope. They devoted themselves to this man they believed was their Savior, giving up everything to follow him. And then, he died – or worse – their own people brought charges against him and had him sentenced and killed. Defeat was snatched from the jaws of victory. The one who was supposed to deliver them *ALL* couldn’t even deliver himself from the cross.¹

This wasn’t the way it was supposed to be. This isn’t how life is supposed to go. Such a short time ago there were nothing but waving palm branches. Remember that? Shouts of Hosanna drowned away any doubts that they had found the long-awaited Messiah. But now all of that was gone!

Instead they found themselves wandering aimlessly heading away from their hopes, their dreams – confused, angry, fearful, beside themselves with grief heading away, away, away on that lonely road to Emmaus.

It’s then that Jesus appears. He comes alongside. Walks with them and listens to their conversation and asks them just exactly what was going on? Unable to recognize him, they respond tersely, “Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn’t a clue about what has happened?”

So, Jesus invites them to tell him their story – which they do. He simply listens. Notice, he doesn’t try to absolve their pain. He doesn’t try to convince them otherwise – that he has been raised. He just listens. And when they are through he responds,

“Don’t you get it? Don’t you remember what you studied in the writings of the prophets? And so he broke open the Word to them and began to unpack the scriptures beginning with the Books of Moses through the prophetic writings pointing out everything that referred to him. But still they could not see.

¹ Jeffrey M. Gallagher, *The Christian Century*, “Reflections on the Lectionary,” April 12, 2017, p.20.

This was the disciples' experience on that first Easter Sunday, Luke tells us. This is still the "same day" when the women went to the tomb and then told the others what they had heard and seen: not just the missing body but the angels saying Jesus is alive. Yet Cleopas and his companion can't see past the empty tomb, which is no sign of victory to them.² No "Alleluias. No lilies. No "He is Risens." Just emptiness and despair.

Grief is an interesting emotion. It can have an incredible power over us. The emotion can be so pervasive that it is as if we are wearing blindfolds. We cannot see the sunshine. We cannot hear the bird's song. We cannot feel the cool breeze. We see only darkness, hopelessness, and we may not even want to live any longer ourselves.

I imagine most of us here know an awful lot about grief – not because we have studied it and can recite what Elizabeth Kubler-Ross has described as the inevitable 5 Stages of Grief – as valuable as her work has been. And not because we have observed it and have watched the agony another has gone through in traversing those same 5 stages. No, we know about grief because we have experienced it firsthand.

If you are anywhere near the age of 40 or above you have likely walked through those stages yourself. You understand grief's confusing, paralyzing, emotional turmoil and it makes perfect sense to you why they couldn't recognize Jesus on the road to Emmaus. You know because you have walked that road. Perhaps you are still walking that road. And when you've walked that road, it doesn't take long to go back, to return, to remember.

In a way that's helpful. It can be an important part of healing. But we eventually have to move on, acknowledging that the pain of loss is simply something we may have to carry with us the rest of our lives. But not on Easter Sunday.

It was getting late and the disciples pressed upon Jesus to stay. Certainly, it was an act of Middle Eastern hospitality, but I think they were uniquely drawn to him as he listen to them. He cared for them and now they, in turn, wanted to care for him.

They invited him into their home to share in the evening meal. Here's the way Luke described what happened: [Move to the communion table]

He sat down with them and took bread – blessed it – and broke it – and gave it to them. And he said to them, "Take and eat – this is for you."

Then their eyes were opened. They recognized him. And then, he disappeared.

We experience this same ritual at least once a month. I bless and break the bread. Then I bless and offer the cup. And each time we come forward to receive we are reminded that it is Jesus who invites ALL of us to this table. I stand as a representative and these symbols are fitting reminders, but it is Jesus who calls us – come to me all

² Jeffrey M. Gallagher, p. 20.

you that labor and are heavy laden. Come to me all you that are weary and brokenhearted. Come to me all you who grieve, who fear, who are angry, who are experiencing bitter disappointment. Come to me all you who have given up on life. I am here. I understand. I know your pain. I want to share it, ease it, and invite you to let it go.

Is this not the way God so often enters our lives? Not in the miraculous, but in the ordinary: taking, blessing, breaking, and giving. In the hug of a friend we haven't seen in a while, in the laughter of a child frolicking in the grass alive with wonder – fearless and free, in the eyes of the homeless person we took the time to really notice, and in blessing an evening meal: we recognize God.

With our eyes opened in the midst of this everyday reality, we are reminded that all is not lost. We are not defeated. We are not alone. Love has won; Easter is here – to stay. We see, and we begin to understand – and in that instant, it's Emmaus that vanishes from our experience.

And so I invite you, please, come forward and receive that loving reminder – in breaking bread we see, we recognize the risen Christ. We are not alone.

Amen.