

**30 April 2017**  
**Luke 24:13-25**

Before the first World War, the Church of England's standard liturgical practice was the saying of Matins, which is what we would know as a 'morning prayer' service without the celebration of the Eucharist. But when the Church of England chaplains went with their troops overseas and into the trenches of WW1, they found that Matins was not meeting the pastoral needs of the men, besides the reading of the psalms. While back home the parish choir sang beautiful musical works in churches that embodied sacred space and created a sense of awe, there was nothing of that sort to be found in the trenches far away from home.

However, when the Eucharist was celebrated and communion distributed among them, it was then that the soldiers found a profound sense of comfort and peace as God was made known to them. The presence of God in the Sacrament transformed the soldiers world of death and violence to a place where for a brief moment in their ghastly surroundings, they could stop and experience God close to them.

On the evening of Maundy Thursday, here in this place, in the sanctuary, a small group of us broke bread and drank wine together, and washed each other's feet. For me, at least, there was a deep sense of God's presence. It was a poignant time as we later stripped the church while we listened to Psalm 22, "My God, why have you forsaken me?". We cleared up and left in silence, waiting for the events of the next few days to unfold.

Jesus also did a lot of eating and drinking with friends and strangers. Only days before today's gospel, he too had shared a meal with his community, probably a passover meal. Then events had moved quickly and decisively to his death.

In his life, he was a guest in many people's houses, as well as eating out in the open, on hillsides, and on the beach.

Here he is both guest and host as we, each Sunday, eat and drink to remember Jesus, and we too rehearse the story, then we physically take in God/Jesus into our very being.

'He took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them,' and it was then, only then, that they recognised him.

What is it about a meal that changes things?

After Jesus' crucifixion these two are walking along the road to Emmaus, distraught, wrapped up in their own pain and anguish. Even when Jesus appears, they are so overwhelmed by their grief that they cannot see straight. They are in a liminal space, betwixt and between, not in control, probably the best place to learn.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Rohr writes

The Latin word *limina* means threshold ... liminality is a special psychic and spiritual place "where all transformation happens". It is when we are betwixt and between and therefore by definition "not in control". Nothing new happens as long as we are inside our self constructed comfort zone.

Nothing good or creative emerges from business as usual. Much of the work of the God of the Bible is to get people into liminal space, and to keep in there long enough so that they can learn something essential. It is the ultimate teachable space, maybe the only one. Day 18 deep calls to deep

They do not recognise him, even as he tells the story in a new light. But, the moment Jesus breaks bread, he breaks through their clouded vision of reality with its focus on their own emotions and needs and they see him in his true reality.<sup>2</sup>  
What is it about a meal that changes things?

Whatever actual experience may lie behind the story, it is now an invitation. It invites us to join the journey. A nice creative tension develops as they wander down the road. It arises because the reports of the women had not convinced the disciples. So Luke's congregations, hearing the story, know the resurrection has taken place. They (and we) comprehend a good deal more about what had happened than they did. We want to tell them, to say, "Listen, see, taste, this is how it is!" Already the story is inviting affirmation.<sup>3</sup>

Then Jesus comes on the scene... These disciples were hoping that Jesus would bring liberation for Israel. That hope took many forms, some military, some peaceful, but it underlies all of Luke's story. Luke envisages a future which brings peace and liberation for Israel and all peoples: "Peace on earth!" "Good news for the poor".

Luke has constructed the story so that we really do want to jump into the conversation, but he is also inviting us to listen to Jesus: the suffering of the Liberator was not tragic derailment of the hope, but part of it and meant to be. This is confusing to anyone believing in the military model. Luke invites us to think alternatively.<sup>4</sup>

By the time Jesus is about to leave them, we have rehearsed the resurrection story. The disciples repeat what we know, and Jesus describes his journey through hardship to glory, a motto for human life which was widely revered at the time. Luke's Jesus, however, will not stop there, but will come to achieve the goal of liberation, however that is imagined.

The traditional hospitality ethic then prevails and Jesus joins them for a meal. We and Luke's hearers know much more is at stake. Countless generations have seen in the breaking of the bread an allusion to their own eucharists - and we do too.

The surreal presence of the invisible man invites us beyond preoccupation with historical reconstruction to engagement with ourselves and Christ's presence in our own community.

Luke's Easter legend is pointing to an abiding reality and inviting us to the same journey and the same table. When Luke reports their realisation that their hearts were burning, he doubtless wants us to be able to affirm the same, both as we understand scripture and as we hear his story and gospel.<sup>5</sup>

Luke has been telling the Emmaus story to engage with this risen Christ. If we could not mount the stage and join the conversation, at least we can join the meal and share the hope for transformation which it embodies - and pours out<sup>6</sup>.

What is it about a meal that changes us?

Were not our hearts burning as he spoke with us? ..Is he not known in the breaking of the bread?

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<sup>2</sup> From John Main OSB, "The Spirit," WORD into SILENCE (New York: Paulist Press, 1981, pp. 37-39

<sup>3</sup><http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MtEaster3.htm>

<sup>4</sup><http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MtEaster3.htm>

<sup>5</sup><http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MtEaster3.htm>

<sup>6</sup><http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MtEaster3.htm>

The world can often appear to be a dark place of violence, injustice and oppression. We too can experience grief and isolation in our own battlefields, just as the soldiers I mentioned earlier did. But we know that through God's revelation to us in both word and sacrament, God is indeed with us. For we know that our God lives and is with us this day, this very day.

Buechner<sup>7</sup> affirms:

*'I believe that although the two disciples did not recognise Jesus on the road to Emmaus, Jesus recognised them, that he saw them as if they were the only two people in the world...*

*And I believe that because he sees us, not even in the darkness of death are we lost to him or lost to each other. I believe that whether we recognize him or not, or believe in him or not, or even know his name, again and again he comes and walks a little way with us along whatever road we're following.*

*And I believe that through something that happens to us, or something we see, or somebody we know - who can ever guess how or when or where? - he offers us, the way he did at Emmaus, the bread of life, offers us a new hope, a new vision of light that not even the dark world can overcome.'*

Come, let's share this meal and be open to change.

Susanna Pain

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<sup>7</sup> <http://frederickbuechner.com/content/recognizing-jesus>