

Series: The Unfinished Business of Easter
#4: "Seeing the Truth of the Empty Tomb"
Luke 24:13-35 NRSV

When you think about "Holy Communion," what comes to your mind? If you're like most people, you naturally think about the Last Supper Jesus ate with his disciples on the night before his death. No doubt, the atmosphere in that Upper Room that evening must have been heavy and sad, as they ate that final meal together in the shadow of the cross. And because in our minds you and I associate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper so closely with the Maundy Thursday meal, we often approach Holy Communion with heavy hearts, almost as if we were going to a funeral!

But the Jesus we worship is NOT dead! Just three weeks ago, on Easter Sunday, we declared to all the world that Jesus is alive! He is risen! Therefore, I'd like to suggest this morning that there is another "Lord's Supper" recorded in the Bible, one which I believe is a more appropriate model for us as we gather around the table during this Easter season.

After all, the season of Easter reminds us that we as Christians are an "Easter People," not a "Maundy Thursday People!" We are a people of hope and joy, not a people of sadness and gloom. Thanks to the resurrection of our Lord, we are "a people of the resurrection" . . . we are an "Easter People!"

Of course, that "other Lord's Supper" I'm referring to here is that wonderful meal in the village of Emmaus on the evening of Easter. Two followers of Jesus, who had been bewildered by the tragic events that led up to the crucifixion of Jesus, were walking home to Emmaus when a stranger joined them on their journey. The stranger asked why they were so glum, and they told him of the awful events that had taken place in Jerusalem over the previous few days. Then the stranger began to explain the prophecies from Jewish scriptures, and showed them how those prophecies had been fulfilled. As they reached their village it was getting dark and they invited the stranger to stay with them. When the meal was served, the guest became the host. He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them to share. Immediately they realized the risen Christ was in their midst and, as soon as they did, Jesus vanished from their sight. They had unexpectedly encountered the risen Lord as he broke the bread.

THAT Lord's Supper was anything BUT sad and gloomy! It was a resurrection meal that uplifted the hearts of those men and gave them an eternal hope and joy – the kind of hope and joy which only Christ can give.

That Easter meal was NOT a meal to commemorate Christ's death and defeat; No, it was a celebration of his eternal life and victory!

So if we are an "Easter People," and believe that we worship a Savior who has been raised from the dead and is present with his people always, then maybe we ought to become better acquainted with this "other Lord's Supper."

It's obvious that this beautiful story in Luke's Gospel is meant to tell us how very important the Sacrament of Holy Communion is for the worship-life of the Easter church. Certainly, the place of the Lord's Supper is vital to the life of the Church, as it has become for our congregation in the past year, as we have made it available every Sunday --- but I don't want to focus on that this morning.

I'll leave that for another sermon.

Because of our limited time this morning, I'd like for us to focus our attention on a different aspect of this story: When I read this story, I see it as something like a "parable" of our own spiritual journey, and I think there are messages of Good News for us that we can take to heart as we travel our own journey through life.

The first message of Good News from this story is this: JESUS COMES TO US WHEN WE NEED HIM THE MOST. The two men walking along the road had been in Jerusalem throughout that terrible Holy Week. They had seen the crowds turn against Jesus. They had watched Jesus being betrayed, tried, and whipped. Finally they had watched him die.

And now, it is three days later and they were on their way back to the town of Emmaus, heart-sick, confused, and disappointed. Their faith was at its lowest point. And that was precisely the time-and-place when Jesus just happened upon them. It took a while for them to recognize that it was Jesus, and Jesus vanished once they recognized him. He had come to them in their time of need.

But don't miss this second point: JESUS STAYED WITH THEM AS LONG AS THEY NEEDED HIM.

What marvelous Good News that is for us . . . that in our lives, no matter what roads we find ourselves wandering along with heavy hearts, Jesus will come to us and will stay with us as long as we need him!

I know that some of you this morning are travelling down a difficult road right now. Life seems to be a cruel hoax. The circumstances of your life seem to betray any hope for the future. But this morning, as you walk along with a heavy heart, know that Jesus walks along-side you. He is here for you when you need him the most - and will stay with you as long as you need him.

Which brings us to the third message of Good News from our story: that, even though Jesus always makes himself available to us, YOU AND I MUST INVITE HIM INTO OUR HEARTS, IF WE ARE TO HAVE OUR EYES OPENED AND RECOGNIZE HIM FOR WHO HE REALLY IS.

Those men from Emmaus opened their home to Jesus. In the same way, you and I must open our hearts to Christ and ask him to abide there with us. Only when Jesus comes into the temple of our hearts can you and I hope to know him for who he really is.

As I said, Jesus is always present – but he never forces himself on us. He waits like a polite guest to be invited to stay for dinner. In the Book of Revelation, we hear the Risen Christ say to us, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

The challenge for us today, then, is this: Are we prepared to take our cue from this story – to open our hearts and invite Christ to come in and eat with us as he promised he would? And more than that, are we willing to make Christ MORE than a guest, and to allow him to take the role of the "host" at the table of our hearts? Until we are willing to do that, our eyes cannot be opened to the reality of the risen Christ in our midst, and our faith will remain weak and shallow.

The final message of Good News from this story grows out of the other three – that WHEN WE HAVE INVITED CHRIST TO BE THE HOST AT THE TABLE OF OUR HEARTS, AND HAVE RECOGNIZED HIM FOR

WHO HE REALLY IS, THEN AS A RESULT, OUR LIVES WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN! We will be changed!

I'm sure that the lives of those two men Jesus appeared to in Emmaus were changed forever because of that encounter. Just think of all the characters of the Bible to whom the Risen Christ appeared, and you can get an idea of just how dramatic the change can be:

You remember Peter, - vacillating, wishy-washy Peter? He encountered the resurrected Christ, also. After the Risen Christ confronted him one morning by the Sea of Galilee and commanded him to "feed my sheep," Peter was a changed man. He wasn't "wishy-washy" anymore! Peter's Easter faith was so strong that Christ used it as the foundation on which he built his Church! [By the way – This will be our resurrection story that we will be considering next Sunday...]

And don't forget Saul, the chief persecutor of the Church. He also met the Risen Christ on a "road," this time the Damascus Road, - and "Saul" become "Paul," the greatest Christian missionary of all time.

You see, encountering Christ makes a difference in your life – or it should! WE should be changed!

You know, there are people we sometimes call "C and E Christians" – Christmas and Easter Christians, also sometimes known as "The Poinsettia and Lily Club". What do I mean? Every Easter Sunday they are in worship, but we don't see them again till Christmas. On Easter, they celebrate that "Christ is Risen" . . . They filled the churches of our community last Sunday, and celebrated that "Christ is Risen" . . . that he is present in our world today . . . and more importantly, present in our lives every day.

But they weren't changed! Their lives bear no evidence that they have encountered the Risen Christ. They are like those two men who set out on that journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus: They were witnesses to the events of Christ's passion and death, but they were not believers in his resurrection.

And so, many worshipers in the Easter crowds every year (except this year, obviously) go back home – They return to their ordinary everyday lives, and live as if nothing has happened. You would never suspect that they ever encountered the Risen Christ – because they NEVER DID.

Are we "C and E Christians" for whom Christ's resurrection makes no difference? Are we wandering back to our ordinary day-to-day lives, pretending that nothing has happened? I hope not!

Today, Jesus happens upon us as we walk along the road, whether we recognize him or not. This morning, he is the host who breaks the bread before our eyes. And as he does, suddenly we may see – maybe for the first time – who he really is, and our lives will be changed forever! The miracle of Emmaus happens every time we break bread together!

In a few moments, we will be receiving the Bread and Wine of Holy Communion. This is NOT a wake for a dead man. This is an Easter party – a celebration of the resurrection – an encounter with our Risen Lord - who "is made known to us in the breaking of bread."

Amen.