



Roanoke, Virginia  
Easter Sunday  
April 1, 2018

***“When a Meal is a Sacrament”***

*Luke 24:13-35*

George C. Anderson

<sup>13</sup> Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup> and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup> While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup> but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

<sup>17</sup> And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”

They stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup> Then 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?”

<sup>19</sup> He 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, <sup>20</sup> and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. <sup>21</sup> But 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. <sup>22</sup> Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, <sup>23</sup> and 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. <sup>24</sup> Some 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.”

<sup>25</sup> Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup> Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” <sup>27</sup> Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

<sup>28</sup> As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup> But 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. <sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They 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?”

<sup>33</sup> That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup> They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” <sup>35</sup> Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Some meals are just to fill the belly. I often eat those meals when I am alone or perhaps with others who are on their phones or watching TV. I often find these meals to be a lonely experience. I will come home late and everyone else has eaten. Or maybe the house is empty and, not being used to being alone, the absence of Millie is more profound than her presence is at a normal meal when we don't think about it. I grab the dish of left-over lasagna out of the fridge, shovel two spoon-fulls in a dish, heat it in the microwave, and then eat while watching the news, irritated that the outer edge of the lasagna is too hot while the inside of the middle is too cold. I eat it because I'm hungry, and maybe because at least some of what I eat warms me.

It is when relationships are added to the recipe that meals become more than filling the belly. Sometimes the relationship seasoning makes the meal about the past. I am sure that most of you are like me in that when you sit down for a Thanksgiving, Christmas or Easter dinner, you sit down with more than those gathered at the table. Memory and imagination take you back-

- to when the 26 year old feeding the baby was once that baby in the high chair,
- when the cousin had more hair and it was black
- to traditions once held that were dear but which ran their course,
- to those who have died but who memory brings back to life again.

The relationship seasoning can make the meal about the future as well. Imagine this meal held the night before a ceremony. Parents stand up to make their toasts. Sure, they tell some funny stories from the past, but they also express their hopes for the future life that one's daughter and another's son will have together. A best man and maid of honor do the same.

Feed the belly, remember the past, and be pulled into the future: take your time with our passage and you'll see those three aspects of a meal at play.

The passage begins with two followers of Jesus walking home. With only the later evidence of not being able to recognize a stranger as a friend, we can assume the light is dim. It has been a long day, and they need to eat.

We can bet that their meal will also need to be what we would call comfort food. They had pinned their hopes on a man who inspired in them a vision and hope of a better, more just and graceful world. But the dream is deferred, if not dead. Because he is dead. Those who should have welcomed him, crucified him.

If they make it home alone, maybe the meal will be nothing more than a way to meet a hunger so they can get some sleep and get another miserable day over with.

But then there is added the seasoning of another person who joins them on their journey. A stranger joins them. He has seen them talking with each other, sensing their grief and confusion. He asks them what they are discussing.

“What an ignorant question?” They can scarcely believe this guy hasn’t heard what has been all that anyone has been talking about these last few days:

- How Jesus who seemed such a *prophet of God* had been betrayed by the *priests of God*;
- How he had inspired such hope that the world could be a better place than it is, but how power politics and vested interests in keeping things the way they are, won out again;
- And how some women upset everyone by saying that they discovered an empty tomb and seen angels, and how some went and saw that the tomb indeed is empty. “Isn’t it hard enough to deal with Jesus’ death than to worry about who took his body and where? And why compound grief with false hope?”

The stranger’s question, you see, takes them to the immediate past; the devastating and traumatic last few days they can’t seem to get beyond.

Then this stranger takes them even deeper into the past. He takes them deep into ancient scripture with its stories, poems, rules and dreams of ancient days-

the books of Moses,  
the books of the prophets,  
the proverbs and poems of wisdom writings.

The stranger carefully explains how Jesus’ life and deeds illumined the heart of scripture... how even his death illumines the heart of God. In explaining scripture, this stranger does for them what Jesus did for them when he was alive. He explains

- how the faith expressed in Moses’ Law is fulfilled in love... that if the Law- the norms and customs of the people of God- is not loving, than it is not God’s Law;
- how worship can take place beyond the Temple but also when and where two or more are gathered in God’s name;
- that the justice that the prophets spoke of is not just about laws and business practices, but also about the poor and weak given voice and protection, and compassion being shown to the blind, lame, crippled, possessed... whether they be male or female, slave or free, Jew or Greek;
- that the cost of a sacrificed animal is nothing compared to the cost to God when humans act in mean, selfish and inhumane ways.

The nostalgia these disciples must be experiencing. This is the way *Jesus* talked. This is the way Jesus brought *scripture to life- scripture to their lives-* inspiring them to believe God not only has expectations of them but that God loves them.

So no wonder they do not want Jesus to leave when they arrive at their home in Emmaus. They beg him to stay for a meal. If he joins them the meal will not simply be to refill their bellies so they can sleep. It might help refill their souls with hope and meaning.

*Even if is only nostalgic hope and meaning.*

I know that some who go to Christmas and Easter services do so not so much because they believe anymore but because they want to recapture in some way something they had in the past. The inside of the middle of their faith may seem cold, but they are warmed by the outer edges of memory. The past is the guest we hope for at some meals and some worship services. I understand that, and if I am describing any of you, know that I'm quite nostalgic myself. I know how services can connect me to simpler and warmer memories of intimacy with God and with others. I enjoy those experiences. If that is you, I am glad you are here.

And Jesus certainly is glad to share in this celebration of the past and joins them in telling the old stories and how it used to be... or was supposed to be. If these disciples feel that they lost Jesus at the cross, and cannot have him in the future, than at least they can lose themselves for one night in memory. It is like Jesus is right there with them again, and their hearts are warmed.

The stranger agrees to stay and have a meal with them. And in that meal, suddenly the past moves into the present. Just a few nights ago, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he blessed and broke it, and gives it to them saying, "Take, eat." Now, on this night, the stranger takes bread in his hands in the same way; he breaks it, blesses it, and gives it to them. And suddenly in the darkness of that dim room, the stranger is revealed to be a friend. The Jesus they thought they had lost is right there with them at that table- his voice, his hands, his love- present at that meal.

And then he is gone. The passage says he vanishes. This could be a resurrection miracle letting them know that the Jesus they knew in the world is not of the world, or it could be a dramatic way of saying that he leaves, abruptly. What I certainly think it tells them and us in a dramatic way is that the Jesus of today's meal, whom we meet in worship- the Jesus who brought to the present the God of the past- does not remain here but is out there in the world. The one who meets us here is out there drawing us to join him in God's work of the future.

And into the future these disciples run. They run to tell others – Simon in particular- what just happened.

They run to tell him and others that Jesus is risen and is out there in the world waiting for them.

They run to tell others the way he explained to them how his death was necessary not because evil wins but because love wins.

We have before us a meal that is a sacrament. What makes a meal a sacrament is Jesus and the truth that we proclaim at Easter, that he is risen. To come to this meal is to accept the fact that we have a hunger that only Jesus can feed; that we need the comfort that can be found here in the warmth of God forgiveness.

I invite you to this meal where Jesus is host. And if he seems at all a stranger to you, maybe you will recognize him again in the breaking of the bread, and then recognize him again in the evidence of God's love working justice, reconciliation, compassion and peace in the world.