

Breaking Bread  
Walk to Emmaus: Luke 24: 13-35  
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At our house, my youngest daughter Ruthie and I have been reading the Percy Jackson books by Rick Riordan. This is a series for people who like Harry Potter and want more. The books imagine the Greek gods as the source of Western civilization throughout time, not just in the Ancient Greece, but in the present too. The books ask, "if the Greek gods were having children with mortals, what would their children be like? What would the adventures of these children, these halfgods, these heroes, be?" Those questions launch the adventures, and the reader is flying through a creative world where the natural and the supernatural, the mortal and the immortal are all mixed together. For some reason, I love these stories.

In the Percy Jackson books, the children of the gods are chased by monsters, and all kinds of disasters and adventures happen. But normal mortals like you and me are never the wiser because of something called "the mist." "The mist" manipulates what mortals see. It is only when you are aware of this immortal world, Greek gods, monsters, everything in between, that you start to see things as they really are. The books are filled with moments where suddenly, the characters see through the mist, they see what is actually happening. They start to see an additional layer to reality.

The Walk to Emmaus is another amazing story where the natural and the supernatural, the mortal and the immortal are all mixed together. It's a story where common disciples see and experience something "more" in the midst of an ordinary day. In the church, during the season of Easter, we read the stories of the Risen Jesus appearing to the early disciples. We tend to think of these stories as recording the appearances of the Risen Jesus. We think of them as history remembered. But I would encourage us to think of these stories as the experiences of the church. Not just the early church, but the church in the present too. These stories point to where disciples in every time will see the Risen Jesus. These stories tell us where to look to see and know that Christ is alive. They invite us into holy moments.

Just after the story of the empty tomb in the gospel of Luke, we are introduced to two disciples walking along the road. One of the disciples is named: Cleopas. This is the only time the name is mentioned in the gospels. Cleopas is not one of the twelve. Cleopas is a common disciple, any disciple, every disciple. We are supposed to see ourselves in Cleopas.

Suddenly a stranger starts walking along the road with the disciples, talking with them. We can see through the Mist, and see that this stranger is the risen Jesus, but these two disciples can't. The stranger then starts opening the scriptures to them, unlocking meaning in the tradition that applies to the moment. Then they invite the stranger to eat with them. Then they gather around a table and the stranger turns it into a communion table. As that bread is broken, their eyes are opened. The mist clears, and they see that this stranger is the Risen

Jesus. Then he vanishes. That experience of the Risen Christ, that clear vision of the sacred dimension to reality is fleeting. But these common disciples, realize their hearts were burning within them as the scriptures were opened, and they proclaim that they saw the Risen Christ in the breaking of the bread.

These are clues to us, common disciples, pointing to where the Mist will clear for us, where we will see something of God. We will catch this glimpse when the scriptures are opened to us in new ways, and when we break bread in particular ways, continuing the values of the communion table.

I read something recently that opened this scripture up in new ways for me, and has deepened my understanding of the communion table. It is a section of the book, *"The Last Week: A Day by Day Account of Jesus's Final Week in Jerusalem"* by Jesus scholars Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan. They suggest that Jesus' Last Supper was to be the First Supper of the future. Our communion table continues the radical meal practice of Jesus. Jesus was asked regularly, "why do you eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Crossan and Borg say that "what Jesus did was eat with "undesirables," the marginalized and outcast, in a society in which the people with whom one shared a meal was hugely significant." The people with whom we share a meal still matters. Think about the school cafeteria and the unspoken rules about who can sit where, or think of the different crowds at the private club compared to McDonald's. It still matters where and with whom we eat.

Jesus' meal practice was about radical inclusion in a society with significant divisions. Jesus expanded the welcome at his table and that offered a very different vision of how society should be. Other stories of Jesus, like the feeding of the five thousand, suggests that Jesus was also expanding the number of people who have something to eat. Behind this practice is a particular theology of Creation, "God owns the world, demands that all get a fair share of its goods, and as God's people we are to establish justice on earth."

Borg and Crossan think that for the early church, the communion table was both the great sacramental symbol and the primary practical program of the kingdom movement." The table suggested to the early church what they should do. It reminded them what Jesus did. In other words, expanding the circle of who is welcome at the table, is how heaven comes to earth. Everyone has enough when bread is broken and shared with all. That's when heaven comes to earth.

The walk to Emmaus says we will see that Christ is still alive and with us, in the breaking of the bread. When we expand the welcome of who can sit at our table, at who can belong, and when bread is broken and shared, when more people have enough. In those moments we will see through the Mist, we will catch a glimpse of the Risen Christ. Today I simply want to focus on inclusion.

This week, I realized that April 16th wasn't only Easter, it was the five-year anniversary of my family's move to Northfield. I've moved into three small towns as an adult, and each time

I've been surprised by how long it can take to feel connected and find belonging. Even with this experience, I've noticed that when I start to find my place and my circle, I can be reluctant to let new people in.

I think our church has an opportunity for ministry. People are moving to Northfield because of work, because of retirement, to live closer to parents or to children. At the center of our tradition and our worship is a table that stretches the circle of belonging to include more and more people. We will see the Risen Christ here when new people start finding their place, connecting and building relationship.

This has been part of the hope of the Connect process for new members. We know that relationship takes time. So we invited new members into a process where they spend enough time with other First UCC people, that they begin to get to know them, where they begin to feel like they are in relationship, where they begin to feel like they belong. Once Connect got rolling, one of the two Connect groups would then go to our Wednesday evening meal and they would eat together. Every week, whoever was there would eat at the same table.

Coffee hour, the Wednesday evening meals that just wrapped up for the year, and yes, the Fighting Apostles French Toast breakfast are places where we break bread with one another, and very importantly they are places where circles can expand to include more people. These are places where the mist clears, and I see the Risen Christ, in part because today's scripture tells me that's where we should look for the Risen Christ. I invite you to do the same thing, look for holy moments in the breaking of the bread, in the expanding of the circle, in the bridging of divisions, in the ways that love holds us together in relationship. These kinds of meals are where we will see a sacred dimension and heaven coming to earth.

We are told to look for the Risen Christ in the opening of the scriptures and the breaking of the bread. The mist will clear, and we will experience holy moments when more people are included, divisions are bridged, and when more people have enough. We will see the Risen Christ for just a moment, and maybe that will be enough to remind us, that love is alive and with us, still able to do more than we think. Amen.