

We know the simple table grace: “Come Lord Jesus, be our guest. Let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen.” Eating together is a sacred event, and that is what happens in our story.

Luke 24:13-49

<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.

<sup>36</sup> While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” <sup>37</sup> They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. <sup>38</sup> He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup> Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as

you see that I have.”<sup>40</sup> And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.<sup>41</sup> While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”<sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish,<sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate in their presence.<sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,<sup>46</sup> and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,<sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.<sup>49</sup> And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so, stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

The Word of God  
**The Word of Life**

Our church calendar shows that we enjoy eating together, as there are so many opportunities to do so. This is in harmony with the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus always seems to be on his way to dinner, at dinner, or on his way from dinner. Indeed, this got him into trouble sometimes as he was eating with tax collectors and sinners, and the religious authorities frowned on this and called him out for doing it. But that criticism didn’t keep him from his mission or stop him from dining with them.

It was for good reason that he was in trouble with the authorities. Eating together in his culture was a sign of affirmation and a bond of friendship. It is important to remember that he dined with the outcasts and the Pharisees, the religious teachers of his day. To paraphrase my favorite song, “Dance with Everybody,” Jesus dined with everybody who came through the door. And sometimes took the initiative to invite himself to dinner.

In today’s story, Jesus dines with two disciples he meets while walking along the road. They are headed home. These two disciples, Passover pilgrims, leave Jerusalem feeling numb as the bottom has dropped out of their world. Jesus, the one they followed and set their hopes for the future on, is dead, executed as a revolutionary criminal by the Roman authorities. This pair had suffered a profound, soul-searing loss. Many of us know that feeling all too well in the death of one dear to us, maybe even more precious than life itself.

They may also have been fleeing Jerusalem in fear, wondering if the same fate that Jesus suffered awaited them at the hands of those same authorities.

But in any case, as they walk, they engage in deep conversation about what has occurred. As they walk along, Jesus joins them and begins walking with them, but they don't recognize him, and I am unsure why. Scholars give many opinions.

Maybe the horrendous wounds of his execution kept them from recognizing him. It's possible. That's what happened to Emmet Till, the youngster visiting Mississippi from Chicago, killed at the hand of racists in Mississippi. His crime was allegedly whistling at a white woman. He was kidnapped from his home, beaten, killed, and tossed in the river. His slaughter was, in many ways, the event that started the modern civil rights movement.

Others say the disciples couldn't see Jesus because God prevented it, and others say they weren't looking for him.

So this apparent stranger joins them and asks what's up, and with a bit of snark comes the reply, "Are you the only one who doesn't know what has happened?" They retell the events and conclude with the painful comment, "We had hoped he was The One! to redeem Israel."

They had the wrong idea about the Messiah, but let's not be too hard on them. All of us misunderstand Jesus from time to time, but the good news is that our misunderstanding does not keep him from coming to us, loving us, and, when the time is right, revealing himself to us. Walking along, they talk about the women's report that the tomb was empty. But that just couldn't be.

Jesus lets them talk, which is a good method of conversing with someone who is grieving. He lets them set the agenda. He doesn't rush into fixing them, and neither should we rush into explaining to someone why they should not be grieving or some other well-meaning platitude. The best thing we can do is listen with compassion and empathy, seeking to understand what this grief means to them.

After a few more miles of listening, Jesus says, "O dear friends, let me tell you what was going on," and he explained to them why he needed to die, but that death was not to be the last word. Life was. I wish Luke had told us what Jesus said, but he didn't.

After this bible study, the two arrive at their home, and as it is late, they prevail upon him to stay with them. They are exercising the hospitality that was to be offered to all strangers. In those days, travelers were dependent on the good will of others as night drew near. And you never knew when the stranger might be an angel sent from God or even God. Recently, hospitality has been rediscovered as one of the essential ministries of the church. It involves being open and welcoming to all folks and inviting them to join our community and dine with us.

The people of Jesus' time exhibit one of the key Biblical values for people of faith: hospitality. They prevail on him to stay, and before you know it, he turns the tables and becomes the gracious host. He blesses the bread and breaks it, and they recognize him. This is a definite picture of communion and what Jesus did at the feeding of the five thousand.

They now recall how their spirits were touched as he told them the scripture's story as it related to him.

And like he appeared, he vanished.

And they got it; it was him. He was known to them in breaking bread together.

They know just what they must do. They hustle back to tell the rest of the disciples and find out that Peter has seen Jesus. And then they tell the others how he was known to two in the breaking of bread.

While they are talking, Jesus appears to all of them and says, "I am hungry. Got anything to eat?" So, they give him some broiled fish. He eats it, gives them a bible study on what God was up to in the Crucifixion and his resurrection, and commissions them to go into the world with the message of repentance and forgiveness. And he promises to empower them/us to do this.

I think eating the fish was the last evidence of his acceptance and forgiveness of the disciples. For remember, they had just deserted him and denied even knowing him. Eating with them reminds them that it is him, and he is alive, not some apparition. It is also a sign of their unbreakable union with him. They abandoned him, but he did not abandon them. Even if we abandon him, he does not abandon us.

So, we need to keep our minds and eyes open to the fact that Jesus is present when we eat together and take communion. He is also present in our other intentional times of eating together in a spirit of love and acceptance.

As we move to the table, let us remember that Jesus walks with us in life and has come to dine with us today. And let us not forget the same thing when we gather for lunch next week. Jesus is here, Jesus forgives us, Jesus welcomes us, and Jesus loves us. Let him be known to us in the breaking of bread.