

Sermon for April 26th

May the words from my lips and the meditations of our hearts always be pleasing to you O God.

The story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is one of the most enticing stories in the Gospel literature and is unique to Luke. What is the purpose for the writer of Luke to add this story? The risen Christ reveals to the disciple the true meaning of his death and resurrection. The key moment in the story is when Jesus meets them on the road.

The disciples are full of grief - their hearts are heavy and they feel keenly the loss of Jesus. And they did not fully believe the witness of the women. But as they walk and talk Jesus comes to them in their need. They were never walking alone.

Jesus gave them the opportunity to go on without him. But they urged him to stay.

Luke uses meals many times in the Gospel and this story's climax comes at the meal. The disciples have urged the stranger to stay with them and share a meal. This is hospitality. This is what the eucharist or Holy

Communion is all about. This is the inclusive nature of Christ's mission and a guide for us.

In Luke's Gospel the tables turn - the disciples who have extended the invitation to the stranger now become the guests and Jesus becomes the host.

The stranger has been willing to accept their hospitality which suggests trust and hope.

And something amazing happens - the disciples recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

The meal that they share becomes an expression of thanksgiving and deepened faith.

And that is what has happened since. Lutherans believe that there are only 2 sacraments - baptism and Holy Communion. When we come to the table we are all equal. You will often hear me say that all are welcome at the table because the invitation comes from Christ himself. And I believe this deeply. I believe that actions are important. I believe that eucharistic hospitality is open to all and must be open to all. Welcome is more important than self preservation.

Eucharist hospitality where all are welcome at the table should emulate the expansive welcome we find in our text

this morning. Hospitality in our time and space may be evangelism.

Sharing the common meal allows communion with Christ. The story of the road to Emmaus moves from isolation to community. And we model our worship on this.

We believe that Jesus is present in word and sacrament and like the disciples on the road to Emmaus our eyes are opened and our hearts can burn.

The story of the road to Emmaus answers the question of how Jesus is to be recognized among us. Here he is revealed through the scriptures and in the breaking of the bread.

We recognize Jesus at our table. Together.

What did Martin Luther say about Communion?

Martin Luther said that Jesus is present with and under the forms of consecrated bread and wine. This doctrine of the Real Presence was first formally and publicly confessed in the Wittenberg Concord of 1536.

Luther believed that Communion was for the strengthening of our faith. Luther also said that Communion is the Lord's supper, not the Christian's supper or the Pastor's supper! You can find that in the Augsburg Confession Article 5. In part 5 of the small confession Martin Luther teaches about the sacrament of Holy Communion and asks what

benefits do we receive? The answer is the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. This is repeated over and over in our lives as we participate in the Eucharist.

Luther felt that the words - do this in remembrance of me were perhaps the most important.

This is what Luther had to say in the Large Catechism.(paraphrased)

Now that we have a proper understanding of this sacrament, there is a great need of a strong admonition, so that such a great treasure may not be heedlessly passed by. What I mean is that those who claim to be Christians should receive this blessed sacrament on a regular basis. For we see that many are becoming listless and lazy about its observance. A lot of people who have now heard the Gospel of God's free gift of forgiveness, and have been freed from the burden and oppression of the Law, will now let a year, or two, or three, or even more years pass by without receiving the sacrament, as if they were such strong Christians that they have no need of it. Some believe they should go only if they feel like going. Some think now that all they have to do is believe and from then on not do a single thing of any sort. Is this all they have learned from the preaching of the Gospel, that they can be so smart and confident that they can despise both the sacrament and the Word of God? In all this, the devil wins a great victory. He is always setting himself against every Christian activity, hounding and driving people away from the true faith in every way that he can. Here he even twists the Gospel itself into a tool which he uses to lead people away from God. Do not let yourself be deceived. Rather, listen to and obey the clear words of Christ, 'DO THIS in remembrance of me.' There should be no reason to compel anyone to come to the sacrament, and I will not do that; but all should want to freely obey and please our Lord Jesus Christ. You may examine yourself in light of this commandment and say to yourself, 'If I am a Christian at all, I should have at least a little longing every once in a while to do what my Lord wants me to do.'

It is certainly true, as I have found in my own experience, and as everyone will find in his own case, that if a person stays away from the sacrament, day by day he will become more hardened against and his faith will grow cold, and eventually, he will spurn it all together. To avoid this we must examine our heart and conscience and act like a person who really desires to be right with God. The more we do this,

the more will our heart be warmed and kindled and our faith will not grow cold and dead.

Luther also had something to say to those who felt unworthy to come to Communion. He had great compassion. Luther said that everyone who comes to Communion comes because they feel unworthy. It is no reason to stay away. Christ welcomes us and forgives us and thereby makes us worthy.

We have found it difficult to fully practice our faith in these past few weeks. We miss the community, we miss the fellowship. We miss hearing the scriptures and sharing in the common meal. This is a strange way to worship and to gather because we know deep in our hearts that our faith is best lived out in community. We know that we need others to help us interpret the scriptures - we need others thoughts to keep us from becoming narrow in our opinions. And we need the shared meal. Jesus instituted the meal for a reason - for community.

But right now that is not possible. So we will continue to find ways to practice our faith - to live out our calling as disciples and yes to share the meal in unique ways.

We may be physically distanced right now - and our hearts may be as heavy as the disciples on the road to Emmaus. But our community continues and our faith is shored up by our time together - in a new way of worship.

But as our text today teaches us we are like the disciples walking on the road to Emmaus. We are not alone. Jesus walks with us and our eyes and our hearts are opened as we hear scripture and as generations before us have known - we know Jesus in the breaking of the bread. So come as you are for the Lord himself has invited you!

AMEN