

“Coffeehouse Communion”

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Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19

Luke 24:13-36

*Then they told what had happened on the road,
and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

Luke 24:35

Let us pray... O God,

May we find daily opportunities to have communion with you and with one another
not only learn about your Beloved Community, but practice it.

Amen

I love the story of the Supper at Emmaus –
how Christ found two grieving disciples and revealed to them
that he had come back to life.

I love the whole 24th chapter of Luke, for that matter,
because it contains the entire message of the Gospel:
Crucifixion and Resurrection, conflict and liberation, fear and failure,
faith and forgiveness, undefeated love, Jesus’ farewell and promise to return –
are all woven into this narrative.

I especially love the scenes and details of Jesus’ fellowship with his disciples,
played out on a journey in the panorama of the Holy Land,
the intimacy of a shared meal, and
intelligent conversation along the way that helped lift
these disciples’ out of their despair.

Food plays a role in several stories about Jesus’ resurrection
including this one.

In Emmaus, he breaks bread – though he didn’t eat it;
Later in Jerusalem, he asks his disciples for something to eat
and they give him a filet of broiled fish.

In the Gospel of John,
Christ has a fire going on the beach for breakfast and
invites the disciples to grill some of the fish
from the huge catch they had just caught.

Food is significant in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and throughout
the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Jesus lived as a Jew and Jewish people were required to observe dietary laws –
or ‘keep kosher’, which originally seemed to be just wise practices
for avoiding disease, but later they became a mark of distinction
to keep the Jewish community separate from other communities.

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Unfortunately, those laws were expanded to ban table fellowship
with people who were considered ritually unclean
like the Samaritans as well as any “sinners” who had broken moral laws.
Christianity broke away from the kosher tradition,
but then came up with its own list for exclusion about who could not
participate in Holy Communion.

At the Last Supper, Jesus shared bread and wine with his disciples when he
instituted the memorial now called the Eucharist or Holy Communion.

According to Roman Catholic practice,
those who receive the bread and drink the cup,
must accept the belief that these elements *become*
the Body and Blood of Christ.

However during the Reformation in the 16th Century,
some Protestant reformers argued that these elements
are only symbolic and not literally changed,
yet they are still to be treated respectfully.

In the United Church of Christ, we have an “open table” to anyone who seeks
the nurture of this spiritual food.

We have the teachings of our Christian tradition to guide each of us
in our understanding of Communion.

Even children may participate at the discretion of their parents
with the encouragement of doing so respectfully.

In many ways, adults should be more like children
when approaching the sacred things of life.

Communion should be experienced with the openness and trust
of those two disciples who walked with Jesus and invited him
to stay with them for supper and a safe place to spend the night.

We don't know whether these disciples brought Jesus to
either one of their own homes or perhaps to an inn,
but this story brings to my mind a place like a “coffeehouse”
where people hang out to talk with friends about serious subjects
over a cup of coffee and something to eat –
a “Coffeehouse Communion”, if you will.

Coffeehouses were popular in the 1950s and '60s –
though passé by the time I came of age.

Coffee has certainly come back into vogue since the 1990s thanks to Starbucks,
but the coffeehouse scene of poetry readings and “open mikes” is still rare.

When I was a student at Lancaster Theological Seminary in the 1980s,
I used to organize a student “coffeehouse” or talent show each semester.

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We would hold these events at the Refectory – our cafeteria,
which was a cozy, brick building with large fireplaces at either end,
and two rows of huge oaken tables and wooden chairs,
and antique pewter chandeliers with rheostat lighting.

On a regular basis in between classes, I loved going to the Refectory
for a cup of coffee and conversation to continue some class discussion,
especially about the faith.

I remember our president, Peter Schmeichen, was an authority on
Freiderich Schleiermacher, an 18th Century scholar of the Reformed tradition
who sought to reconcile the scientific arguments of the Enlightenment
with Protestant beliefs.

He is considered to be the "Father of Modern Liberal Theology".

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Schleiermacher

Dr. Schmeichen told us this great theologian would gather with his students
for a ‘Schleiermacher kaffeeklatsch’ –
or what I would call a “Coffeehouse Communion”.

The camaraderie and experimentation of those seminary days were fun,
as we tried out ideas in daily chapel, youth ministry, and “kaffeeklatsches”.
Yet trying out those same ideas once we were ordained as new pastors,
we would often find that congregations weren’t quite ready for them –
though they would patiently endure their young pastors’ enthusiasm.

I used to attend a coffeehouse in Montclair, NJ called “The Outpost in the ‘Burbs”
which operated out of the parlor of First Congregational UCC in Montclair,
and featured folk music and progressive jazz every other Friday.

There was a group of us who used to set up the chairs, refreshments,
sound equipment and lights.

Some served on the board of trustees which has allowed The Outpost
to maintain continuity through the years and manage
the support of a financial grant from the State of NJ
as a not-for-profit organization.

There was no specific “evangelistic” agenda, though the person who started it
was the associate minister of the host church.

The Outpost became one of the premier coffeehouses in New Jersey,
attracting major talents of the folk scene.

Unfortunately, that congregation took little interest in that program
which admittedly was focused on entertainment.

But it was more than that to me...

The Outpost Coffeehouse was a place where I felt welcome –
a place that practiced a ministry of hospitality.

We are already doing this – to an extent...

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We do this with our “Pizza-Game Nights”, “Dine With Nine” events,
“Mens Fellowship Breakfast” at Perkins,
and on the first Tuesdays of each month,
I host a “Clergy Café” at Barnes & Noble with our retired ministers
and every Wednesday, “T-Time With The Pastor”.

I have always valued the fellowship of my colleagues – and that list includes
anyone who wants to talk about God and the world we live in.

The Greek word for “Fellowship” is “Koinonia”
which was one of the defining characteristics of early Christian community;
But there’s another term in English for this concept
that I really hope you all would become more familiar with and
comfortable about – and that is ‘Bible study’.

You don’t have to be a great theologian or a scholar to learn more about
our faith as Christians.

Those first disciples were fishermen, tax collectors, property stewards, and women –
women who were otherwise excluded from formal education back then.

It helps to have a Bible on such occasions – to keep everybody accurate,
and the cup of coffee is optional for keeping the conversation caffeinated;

But the main thing is there is something there for us even now to be discovered,
where we can share in what those two disciples experienced at Emmaus
when they said,

“Didn’t our hearts burn within us when he talked to us on the road –
when he opened for us, the meaning of the scriptures?”

Amen

*Our first lesson today is from Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19
and it could be what Jesus had said upon his Resurrection...*

- 1 I love the Lord because he hears
my requests for mercy.
- 2 I'll call out to him as long as I live,
because he listens closely to me.
- 3 Death's ropes bound me;
the distress of the grave found me—
I came face-to-face with trouble and grief.
- 4 So I called on the Lord's name:
"Lord, please save me!"

- 12 What can I give back to the Lord
for all the good things he has done for me?
- 13 I'll lift up the cup of salvation.
I'll call on the Lord's name.
- 14 I'll keep the promises I made to the Lord
in the presence of all God's people.
- 15 The death of the Lord's faithful
is a costly loss in his eyes.
- 16 Oh yes, Lord, I am definitely your servant!
I am your servant and the son of your female servant—
you've freed me from my chains.
- 17 So I'll offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to you,
and I'll call on the Lord's name.
- 18 I'll keep the promises I made to the Lord
in the presence of all God's people,
- 19 in the courtyards of the Lord's house,
which is in the center of Jerusalem.
Praise the Lord!

Let us be guided and challenged by these words.

Inspired by Luke 24:13-36

LATER THAT DAY,

TWO OF THE MEN WERE WALKING TO A VILLAGE NAMED EMMAUS,
ABOUT SEVEN MILES FROM JERUSALEM;
AND THEY WERE TALKING ABOUT
ALL THESE TERRIBLE AND WONDERFUL THINGS
THAT HAD HAPPENED.

AS THEY WERE TALKING AND WALKING TOGETHER,
JESUS, HIMSELF, DREW NEAR AND WENT WITH THEM;
AND HE ASKED THEM,

“WHAT IS THIS CONVERSATION YOU ARE
HAVING WITH EACH OTHER AS YOU WALK?”

THEY STOPPED RIGHT WHERE THEY WERE
AND THEY REALLY LOOKED SAD.

ONE OF THEM NAMED CLEOPAS SAID TO HIM,
“ARE YOU THE ONLY VISITOR TO JERUSALEM
WHO DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT THE THINGS
THAT HAVE HAPPENED THERE
IN THE PASSED FEW DAYS?”

HE SAID TO THEM,

“WHAT THINGS?”

THEY SAID TO HIM,

“CONCERNING JESUS OF NAZARETH,
A PROPHET MIGHTY IN WORD & DEED
BEFORE GOD & ALL THE PEOPLE
WHO WAS HANDED OVER BY
OUR CHIEF PRIESTS & RELIGIOUS EXPERTS
THOUGH WE HAD HOPED THAT HE WAS THE ONE
WHO WOULD RESCUE ISRAEL.”

“YES, AND BESIDES ALL THIS,
IT IS NOW THE THIRD DAY SINCE
THAT HAPPENED;
AND SOME OF THE WOMEN OF OUR COMMUNITY
WENT TO HIS TOMB AND CAME BACK,
SAYING THEY HAD SEEN ANGELS
WHO SAID THAT HE WAS ALIVE!”

“SOME OF THE MEN WHO WERE WITH US
WENT TO THE TOMB AND FOUND IT
JUST AS THE WOMEN HAD SAID,
BUT HE WAS NOT THERE...”

AND ‘HE’ SAID TO THEM,

“OH, MEN OF LITTLE FAITH WITH HEARTS
WHO ARE SLOW TO BELIEVE
ALL THAT THE ‘PROPHETS’ HAVE TOLD YOU!
WAS IT NOT NECESSARY FOR THE MESSIAH TO SUFFER
AND THEN, ENTER INTO GLORY?”

AND HE BEGAN TO INTERPRET FOR THEM

ALL THE THINGS IN SCRIPTURE PERTAINING TO... HIMSELF.
AS THEY DREW NEAR TO THE PLACE TO WHICH THEY WERE GOING,
HE SEEMED TO BE GOING FURTHER.

THEY DELAYED HIM, SAYING,
 “OH, STAY WITH US, BECAUSE...”
 “IT IS TOWARDS EVENING!”
 “AND THE DAY IS ALMOST OVER!”
SO HE WENT IN TO STAY WITH THEM.
WHEN THEY WERE SEATED FOR DINNER,
 THIS STRANGER TOOK THE BREAD,
 BLESSED IT, BROKE IT AND GAVE IT TO THEM...
AND THEY RECOGNIZED HIM –
 JUST AS HE VANISHED OUT OF THEIR SIGHT!
AND THEY SAID,
 “DIDN’T OUR HEARTS BURN WITHIN US
 WHEN HE TALKED TO US ON THE ROAD?”
 “WHEN HE OPENED TO US THE MEANING OF THE SCRIPTURES!”
AND THEY RACED BACK FROM THERE
 TO JERUSALEM IN AN HOUR...
THEY CAME TO THE ELEVEN DISCIPLES
 WHO WERE GATHERED IN AN UPPER ROOM
 WITH OTHERS WHO SAID,
 “THE LORD HAS RISEN INDEED
 AND APPEARED TO PETER THE ROCK!”
THEN, THEY...TOLD...WHAT HAD HAPPENED
 TO THEM ON THE ROAD AND
 HOW HE HAD BEEN MADE KNOWN TO THEM
 BY THE BREAKING OF BREAD.
AND AS THEY WERE STILL SPEAKING, LOOK HERE!
 JESUS STOOD IN THEIR MIDST

Luke.24

[1] But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared.

[2] And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

[3] but when they went in they did not find the body.

[4] While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel;

[5] and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

[6] Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee,

[7] that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise."

[8] And they remembered his words,

[9] and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

[10] Now it was Mary Mag'dalene and Jo-an'na and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles;

[11] but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

[13] That very day two of them were going to a village named Emma'us, about seven miles from Jerusalem,

[14] and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

[15] While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.

[16] But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

[17] And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad.

[18] Then one of them, named Cle'opas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

[19] And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,

[20] and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.

[21] But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened.

[22] Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning

[23] and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.

[24] Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see."

[25] And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

[26] Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

[27] And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

[28] So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further,

[29] but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them.

[30] When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.

[31] And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight.

[32] They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"

[33] And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them,

[34] who said, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"

[35] Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

[36] As they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them.