

“Breaking Bread”

The Rev. Drew Willard
UCC at The Villages, FL
Traditional Service ©
April 4th 2015

Luke 24:13-33^a

‘So they drew near to the village to which they were going.

He appeared to be going further, 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.’

Luke 24:28-29

Let us pray... O God,

Let hospitality be our strategy for changing the world to overcome evil with good.

May we sit down at table to break bread with strangers and find you there, too.

Amen

Hospitality was an important trait of the early Christian community –

and hospitality was evident among Jesus’ followers

that morning of the third day after Jesus’ trial and crucifixion,

when women who were his disciples, came to his tomb

to finish preparing his body for a proper burial;

And hospitality was characteristic of those believers at day’s end

who invited the resurrected Christ in for dinner and a safe place to stay –

though they had no idea who he was at the time.

Even so, those two men still had to get a dose of sensitivity training

directly from Jesus as he chided them for not listening

to what the ‘prophets’ had told them –

meaning they should have listened to their womenfolk

and taken seriously what *they* had to say.

The men didn’t believe the women’s report that angels proclaimed

Jesus had risen from the dead.

These two fellows still didn’t get it, though they met Jesus himself on the road;

But they were so moved by what this stranger had to say to them

on their walk to Emmaus together, they took him home at day’s end...

Hospitality – we know the word, but how often do we see it practiced...

standing in line somewhere, or driving on the road,

or how people speak to each other, or by what they write on the internet?

Haven’t we lamented the casual vulgarities and the slow slide into incivility

that American society has taken for decades now?

It is not just here anymore,

but the whole world is getting locked into a kind of social Darwinism

that claims ‘only the strong survive’.

These days, it’s getting harder to tell the difference between

religious fundamentalism and gangster culture.

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Seems like people everywhere are drawing lines in the sand, building walls, and defending their God-given right to own an arsenal.

Islamic extremism has opened fronts all over the world – armed invasions in north and central Africa and the Middle East as well as indiscriminate attacks in Europe and here in America and days ago, a college campus in Garissa, Kenya.

Even so, it's not just violence anymore for political or religious reasons – now, it's for no reason, too, like the Newtown and Germanwings tragedies.

Actually there is always a reason; Evil is not congenital, people are not born that way; Pain is always the root cause of evil.

Mental illness is not the same as evil, but the pain caused by mental illness left untreated can certainly lead to evil consequences.

As societies become more violent, more dysfunctional, sicker, and even insane, the temptation to take 'an eye for eye' becomes more prevalent, too.

There seems to be no escaping even the limited use of violence when responding to such threats as ISIS or a lone mass murderer.

However, it is not possible that violence itself will solve anything;

It still calls for crossing the abyss of ignorance between people – and not just to find out where the pain is;

But we are challenged to take an active interest in others – especially those are strangers to us, so that we might accept them for who they are as true human beings and be accepted in return.

Doesn't that sound like what hospitality is about – and what Christianity ought to be about?

At the 2011 "Gladdening Light" symposium in Winter Park, I heard Dominic Crossan speak about how the Roman trading center in northern Israel called Sepphoris was significant because it *wasn't* mentioned in the New Testament.

I began to see how many events and details of the Gospel – especially the parables, support his theory about why this was so.

To support Sepphoris as a city, the Romans needed money which they got from the Jewish people through extortionate taxes backed up by the fear of violence.

Jewish farmers went from owning land their people had been on for generations to dayworkers on what was their fields, if not to become beggars or bandits.

Their property was absorbed into big estates – like farmlands here going to big corporations or condominiums, which were owned by absentee landlords and run by corrupt stewards.

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Jesus sent his first apostles, out two by two without a purse or extra clothes
not to the urban areas like Sepphoris,
but first to the homeowners in the countryside.

They brought with them the makings of Christian community that include
prayers, hymns, healings, and teachings – and helped to mend
the torn fabric of society between homeowner and homeless.

Hospitality was Jesus' strategy for conquering the world –
and Jesus modeled this himself in today's Gospel lessons from Luke 24.
In time, his apostles would go forth out onto the Roman roads and sea lanes,
placing themselves at the mercy of those they met along the way –
and the adventures of such a life of faith.

As they found homeowners who would take them in,
families of faith would form, take root – first in Israel, then throughout
Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, the Greek Islands, barbarous regions of Europe,
Egypt and throughout the Roman Empire and beyond to Ethiopia, India,
and Ireland – but not without trouble.

The first Christians brought with them their hope for a better world and joy
and the people they met in those places wanted to be like them in their faith.

Christianity – at its best, allows people to keep who they are as a culture,
while sloughing off what is false and unjust.

The Roman Empire did not get it – they did not understand,
and so, they violently suppressed the Christian movement;

But within 500 years, Christianity would be adopted –
and co-opted as the state religion of Rome,
setting aside humility for exceptionalism – as in domination.

But fortunately, reformations happens every so often – like every 500 years.
Christianity's last Reformation was in 1517, so we are due.

There's nothing better at reminding you who you are
than when you are in the presence of those who are different from you.
Enemies serve a similar purpose, usually bringing out the worst in us.

But when we encounter people of another culture for who they are
and allow ourselves to be ourselves, too – we grow.

Accept and be accepted for who you are –
the next thing you know, Beloved Community happens!

Do you realize we have some amazing connections as a church
with groups very different from ourselves.

There's Temple Shalom right up the street with whom we have done
many interfaith ventures including Peace Sunday
and Community Thanksgiving.

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Sheldon Skurow the synagogue's spiritual leader,
has been very open to working with us and Imam Abdurrahman Sykes.
Imam Sykes has been our link to learning more about Islam –
though our contact with Muslim people has remained limited.
The farmworker community of Calle de Milagros
is providing us with yet another opportunity for us to grow and learn
as Christians, relying on the 'love ethic' as our guide.
And those farmworkers know how to celebrate their faith –
and that means food, music, and soccer, too.

We are finding inroads here in our Villages community,
thanks to our Community Garden as well as
fund-raising dinners and cruises, educational and charity events.
The heart of what we do, though, is our worship on Sunday mornings
along with other sacramental events throughout the year.
How well we grow as a congregation depends directly
on how well we practice hospitality on Sunday mornings...

How well American society grows may very well depend on the same principle –
consider the Religious Freedom Restoration Act controversy these days.
The original federal law in 1993 was to protect individuals' 1st Amendment rights –
freedom of religion from federal, state, and local government interference.
But subsequent rulings by the Supreme Court have opened the door
to serve corporate interests rather than individual religious rights,
Now, Indiana and Arkansas have passed legislation
that would allow the potential for discrimination in offering public services.
Florida is poised to do something similar with Senate House Bill 7111,
which would allow adoption placement agencies to reject potential parents
on the basis of their corporation's stated religious beliefs rather than
the 'love ethic' of conscience and justice.

Martin Luther King, Jr. had this to say about the balance
between the private and public domains:

"I think there is a great difference between the two ...

*I don't think anybody should have the right to just come in my house
that I may privately own*

But now if I turn my house into a store...

then I have certain obligations to the public beyond my particular whims ...

If a business is in the public market, then it cannot deny access

*[a business owner] should not have the freedom to choose his customers
on the basis of race or religion."*

And these days, that means gender, too.

Here at the United Church of Christ at The Villages, we say,
“No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey,
you’re welcome here.”

Those disciples who met Jesus Christ on the road while traveling to Emmaus,
were unaware of who he was at first, yet recognized in this stranger
a person they could trust.

Friends, let’s make room for each other at the table –
to break bread together as if Christ Jesus himself were to show up.
Let us begin a reformation ourselves as individuals and as a family of faith,
based on hospitality to overcome evil with good.

Amen

Luke 24:13-33^a

[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...

READER THREE Inspired by Luke 24:13-33a

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 PAST 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 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.

[BUT] 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

WHILE HE TALKED TO US ON THE ROAD?”

“WHEN HE OPENED TO US THE MEANING OF THE SCRIPTURES!”

AND THEY RACED BACK TO JERUSALEM IN AN HOUR...

Dr. King also said

...[T]here are two types of laws. One is a just law and one is an unjust law.

I think we all have moral obligations to obey such laws.

On the other hand, I think we have moral obligations to disobey unjust laws because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good.

I think that the distinction here is that when one breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, he must do it openly,

he must do it cheerfully he must do it lovingly, he must do it civilly, not uncivilly, and he must do it with a willingness to accept the penalty.

<https://nbclearn.com/files/nbcarchives/site/pdf/48756.pdf>

For the past several days, Indiana Gov. Mike Pence has found himself at the center of a political firestorm over his state's adoption of a new Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Many believe that Indiana's law went too far, including many in the faith community, because it could have opened the door for businesses to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. Pence has repeatedly denied this was the intent — and early Thursday morning, Indiana's Republican leaders [announced a deal](#) that they say would make it clear no one will "be able to discriminate against anyone at any time." Read the changes [here](#). The new anti-discrimination language has already drawn a positive response from some of the original law's critics.

Of course, the debate continues, as those on one side say the clarification doesn't go far enough and those on the other that it was an unnecessary concession. We see the RFRA debate extending to other states, like Arkansas, where amid concerns from Wal-Mart and his own son, [Gov. Asa Hutchinson last night said](#) he wouldn't sign the pending religious freedom legislation until it mirrors the federal law — taking a note from the Indiana dust-up.

The dangerous part of the original Indiana law was that by including businesses in RFRA protections, it [went further than other state RFRA laws](#) and could even give permission for discrimination.

Martin Luther King, Jr. made this insightful distinction between the private and public domains:

"I think there is a great difference between the two ... I don't think anybody should have the right to just come in my house that I may privately own But now if I turn my house into a store — if I turn it into a department store, if I turn it into a lunch counter, or anything like that — then I have certain obligations to the public beyond my particular whims ... If a business is in the public market, then it cannot deny access [a business owner] should not have the freedom to choose his customers on the basis of race or religion."

The federal RFRA law of 1993, which Arkansas' Hutchinson hopes to better emulate, was bipartisan, sponsored by Utah Republican Orrin Hatch and Massachusetts Democrat Ted Kennedy. It has been successfully used to protect a wide range of people — Native Americans, Sikhs, Jews, Muslims, Christians, and others — in the free exercise of their religious convictions. People of faith from across the political spectrum rightly believe such legislation is necessary, as threats to religious liberty have come from governments on both the right and the left, and even from otherwise democratic governments in increasingly "secularized" societies. Other states have adopted similar laws, as the federal law doesn't apply to states.

Regardless of its intent, we all know that there are people who would take HB 7111 2015 as a blank check to act on their prejudices. I am a pastor for a progressive Christian church and the only threat to my religious belief and practice I see would be the adoption of this bill. Trust the 'love ethic' as a proper test for whether a household is safe for the adoption of a child.

This bill would allow adoption agencies that are contracted by the state to deny loving families to children based on the agency's religious or moral objections, rather than a family's ability to care for a child.

Telling private agencies that they can deny children placements with qualified families based solely on the agency's religious beliefs will keep all kinds of good parents in our diverse state from providing Florida's neediest kids a family for any number of reasons: because they are of a different faith than the agency, they are divorced, they hunt, they are pro-life or pro-choice, or they are a same-sex couple.

We all have the right to our religious beliefs, but religious freedom does not mean individuals or companies can impose their beliefs on their employees or the public, and in this case, limit the opportunities for our state's most vulnerable children.

Please vote in opposition to HB 7111 and defend equality, not discrimination, in our state.

MR. WICKER: Dr. King, you said a moment ago that Alabama was a state that gives respectability to the resistance and defiance of the law, and you listed an observance of the law by local agencies in the South as one of the cardinal aims that you were seeking. Yet on March 9, you led the second march on Montgomery in violation of a federal injunction not to march. You said that order was unjust and John Lewis, one of your colleagues, said that "Negroes had a constitutional right to march, injunction or no injunction." Now, was that in keeping with the spirit of non-violence and the restraint that has always characterized your movement, and could you explain your reasoning in defying the court order that day?

DR. KING: Well, let me say two things to that, Mr. Wicker. First I did not consider myself defying the court order that particular day. I consulted with my attorneys before the march, and they stated that they felt that it was an invalid order and that it would not be—that I would not be in contempt of court of violating the court order, if I led the march to the point of having a moral confrontation with the state troopers at the point where the people were brutalized on Sunday, so I still don't consider that breaking a court order or breaking what I consider an unjust law. On the other hand, I must be honest enough to say that I do feel that there are two types of laws. One is a just law and one is an unjust law. I think we all have moral obligations to obey such laws. On the other hand, I think we have moral obligations to disobey unjust laws because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. I think that the distinction here is that when one breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, he must do it openly, he must do it cheerfully he must do it lovingly, he must do it civilly, not uncivilly, and he must do it with a willingness to accept the penalty. And any man who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust and willingly accepts the penalty by staying in jail in order to arouse the conscience of the community on the injustice of the law is at that moment expressing the very highest respect for law.

MR. WICKER: I can sympathize with a good deal of that, but it seems to me that you get into a very difficult point, here, at which one man's conscience is set, in fact, above the conscience of society, which has invoked the law. How are we to enforce law when a doctrine is preached that one man's conscience may tell him that the law is unjust, when other men's consciences don't tell them that?

DR. KING: I think you enforce it, and I think you deal with it by not allowing anarchy to develop. I do not believe in defying the law, as many of the segregationists do, I do not believe in evading the law as many of the segregationists do. The fact is that most of the segregationists and racists that I see are not willing to suffer enough for their beliefs in segregation, and they are not willing to go to jail. I think the chief norm for guiding the situation is the willingness to accept the penalty, and I don't think any society can call an individual irresponsible who breaks a law and willingly accepts the penalty if conscience tells him that that law is unjust, I think that this is a long tradition in our society, it is a long tradition in Biblical history; Meshach and Abednego broke an unjust law and they did it because they had to be true to a higher moral law. The early Christians practiced civil disobedience in a superb manner. Academic freedom would not be a reality today if it had not been for Socrates and if it had not been for Socrates' willingness to practice civil disobedience. And I would say that our own history there is nothing that expresses massive civil disobedience any more than the Boston Tea Party, and yet we give this to our young people and our students as a part of the great tradition of our nation. So I think we are in good company when we break unjust laws, and I think those who are willing to do it and accept the penalty are those who are part of the saving of the nation.

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