

Who Brings the Bread?  
Luke 24:13-36  
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I'll never forget the first time I purchased bread and juice for a communion service. I was guest preaching at a church where it made sense for me to wear one of those black shirts with the little white tab clerical collar, like Roman Catholic priests often do. And I get this call to pick up the elements on my way to church because the regular person can't do it. And so there I am at the grocery store walking down the aisle with a loaf of bread in one hand, and a jar of grape juice in the other, and getting a range of looks from the other customers somewhere between "Something is just not right here" to "What kind of Messiah does he think he is anyway?" I guess for some people, the elements just grow on trees and magically appear on the Communion Table on Sunday.

Actually, of course, someone buys them and prepares them, whether on the little trays and in the little cups, or some other way. But even before that happens, the reality is that someone grows the wheat and the grape, and someone harvests it, and someone else works in the factory that produces the final product, and someone else drives the truck to bring it to my store, and someone else takes my money and puts it in a bag at the store, but all of that process, and whether it is just or not, that is another sermon entirely. What I want to focus on tonight is just who brings the bread to the table, and what that means for us as we approach the table

tonight, and as we prepare our hearts and minds for next Sunday's Consecration Sunday service.

Tonight's story from the Gospel of Luke will perhaps be instructive in that regard. Here we have probably the most famous of the post-resurrection, pre-ascension appearances of Jesus, on the road to a village called Emmaus. There is a great deal of interesting and spiritually enriching stuff in the first part of the story, how the two despondent disciples are joined by Jesus on their journey, how they experienced what happened in his life and crucifixion, how Jesus "interpreted to them the things about himself in all the Scriptures" as they walked along together, but I want to focus on the second part of the story, what happened when they arrived at their destination. You see, that is where many of us are, perhaps not all of us here tonight, but many of us have heard the story, read the Bible, been to Sunday school, in a sense we've had the experience those two disciples had on the road, and we've arrived at our destination. Not that our journey is complete, mind you, not that we are perfected, but that the walking phase has landed us somewhere and what happens next is important too.

So Cleopas and the other unnamed disciple and Jesus arrive at Emmaus, and Jesus acts like he is going to continue on his journey. Somehow I doubt that, but that is what it says. To me, it seems more like he is fishing for an invitation to dinner, seeking to plumb the depths of these two disciples' understanding of hospitality and grace. You see, in those days, it was pretty much expected that you

would invite a traveler to join you for a meal after dark, that you would even give them a place to stay for the night. And so we could imagine Jesus heading right through the door, but he plays coy and they take the bait and invite him in. And so they sit down at the table together, and Jesus takes the bread he finds there, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. Maybe you've heard that series of words before. Took, blessed, broke, gave. It is the formula Jesus always uses for these types of meals. Feeding of the four thousand? Took, blessed, broke, gave. Feeding of the five thousand? Took, blessed, broke, gave. Last Supper? Took, blessed, broke, gave. Last Sunday's celebration of the Sacrament at ECF? Took, blessed, broke, gave. Later tonight? Yes, you guessed it, Took, blessed, broke, gave. You'll hear that formula each and every time you come to the table because its pattern is not only what Jesus actually did at meals, but because it is the pattern of his own life, and because it must be the pattern of our own lives as disciples, and because the meal, and the life of Jesus, and our lives together are bound up in bread, in wine, in God.

“Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.” You've heard those words before too. I use them almost every time we celebrate the Sacrament, not because they are the only proscribed words in the liturgy – there are others – but because I think it is the point of the whole exercise, that in the experience of this sacrament we meet Christ again, he is made known to us again, we experience his grace anew, our eyes are opened yet one more time to the mystery and the glory

and the joy of the Lord. How does our story tonight conclude? “Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.” Jesus reveals himself not only as the “bread of life,” but in the bread itself, the stuff on the table, the wheat turned into loaf, the staple food for all humanity. Thanks be to God!

But how did the bread get there? Did Jesus, like a good guest invited to a dinner party, stop at a bakery on the way, and pick up something that complemented the rest of the menu? No, it was there waiting for him in that house at Emmaus. This is an interesting feature of all the feeding stories in the Gospels except at the end of the Gospel of John at the breakfast on the beach, that in none of them does Jesus bring the bread. In this story? Someone else brought it. Feeding of the four thousand? The disciples had it with them. Feeding of the five thousand? A little boy had five loaves and two fish. Last Supper? Made ready by someone else in the Upper Room. Last Sunday’s celebration of the Sacrament at ECF? I can assure you it was not Jesus cutting up the bread in the kitchen before the service. Later tonight? Yes, you guessed it, no Jesus there either. You see, someone else always brings the bread that Jesus takes, blesses, breaks, and gives. Jesus never brings the bread. That is our job, our contribution to the feast, our part in having our eyes opened that we might recognize him.

Now, that is not an open invitation for everyone to bring a loaf of bread to church the next time we have communion, although if you would like to contribute

that some week, please come talk to me. But it should tell us something about how we approach the table, how we approach God, how we approach one another, with a gift to share, with something to contribute, with something that will play a part in making Jesus known, recognizable, present. If it is not a nice loaf of sourdough bread, what is it? Well, we already brought our confession. That's a start. We've prayed and sung and made an offering. That's all good. But of course what we are called to give is more than what we come to church once a week to give. We are called to give our whole lives to be taken by God, blessed by God, broken by God, and given by God to a hungry world whose eyes need to be opened. And so the bread we are called to bring to the table is really nothing more or less than our generosity, our willingness to give every minute of our lives, every ounce of our strength, every stray thought, every idle moment, every material good. Is that enough? Or we can just bring bread.

Many of you prayed for months for a friend of mine in Minnesota, a member of my former church, Chad Ruble, who was battling esophageal cancer. Earlier this year, Chad died, and since then, his wife Mary has been sharing with their friends her journey through the grief process. Recently on Facebook she posted something she had found on the Young Widow Bulletin Board, a sort of open letter from a widow to those who might be wondering what it was like in the first days and months following the death of a spouse. One of the sections of this letter acknowledges the very common experience of dealing with people who are eager

in some fashion to help. And so, this is what the young widow writes, in the section called “Practical Things You Can Do”:

“I understand that a lot of you find it hard to cope with my emotional pain. Hate to see me hurting so. If you can't help me emotionally, you can help me practically.

- Don't ask me what you can do to help. I have no idea, I am overwhelmed.
- If you are an organized person offer to manage my bills. Collect the bills as they come in and let me know when they need to be paid, and make sure I do. Time has no meaning for me right now. It's only when the cut-off notices come that I realize I need to do something.
- Get copies of photos I don't have from family and friends and put them in an album for me. It will be one of the most precious gifts you could give me.
- Bring me some meals that I can just put in the microwave.
- Find out what sort of bread, milk, toilet paper, etc I use and bring me them to me. I have no idea I need them until I run out, so don't bother asking me if I need anything.

“Don't ask me what you can do to help. Find out what sort of bread I use and bring it to me.” It is that simple. When you do that, Christ will take that bread and bless it and break it and give it and your eyes will be opened and you will recognize him. Or at least the widow will. Or maybe you both will, together.

Each of you bring one or more gifts to ministry, gifts as varied as encouragement, compassion, prayer, organization, teaching, music, technology, and yes, generosity and even money. And God takes those gifts and blesses them and breaks them and gives them, and as a result, eyes are opened and people recognize him. Next Sunday you will have an opportunity to bring your specific and personal financial commitment to the eye-opening ministry of Escazú

Christian Fellowship as we celebrate Consecration Sunday. Perhaps it is more than just ironic that some of the most popular euphemisms for money in English, at least in the US, have to do with bread. We frequently call it bread or dough. And so I invite you to spend some time this week reflecting on just how much bread you will bring each week. You've heard me say it before that God gives us a better deal than you'll find anywhere in the marketplace: a 90% discount. You see, the bread we break, the cup we drink, are Christ's body and blood, all of it, 100% of it, the same 100% God really asks of us as followers of that Jesus Christ who gave everything. And yet, we are only asked to give 10% of our money. Such a deal!

You may not be a tither, that churchy term for someone who gives one tenth of their income, and that's OK. You may be a tither who splits their tithe between different ministries, and that's OK too. You may be a tither who gives all 10% or more to ECF and that is definitely OK too. But no matter how much you give, you are giving a percentage. You may not know exactly what that percentage is, and if you don't, I invite to think about it this week, and make it an intentional amount as you come forward next week with your Estimate of Giving Card. And if you do know what percentage you give, let me invite you think about increasing it, as God gives you the capacity to do that. You see, there are a lot more eyes that need to be opened for the first time, and our own eyes which need to be opened all the time. And when we bring our bread, Christ does something amazing with it, and our

eyes are opened, and we recognize him. And may that be true for us this night as well. Amen.