

The Third Sunday of Easter  
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Luke 24:13-35

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### **An Easter Walk**

Grace to you and peace from our loving God, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

These lessons speak to me with one voice. It isn't often that I sense a thread so well woven through three separate portions of scripture, but in these three from Acts, First Peter, and Luke, I hear the theme of community strongly.

Acts 2:42, summarizes the passage we just read: "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers."

What we have here is a simple statement of four elements of community in Christ: 1) devotion to teaching, 2) devotion to communal life, 3) devotion to the breaking of the bread (holy communion), and 4) devotion to the prayers. That's not a bad design for shaping the life of congregations and of groups of people who wish to take seriously their place in the Body of Christ. Learning about God's word, living in a devoted community of believers, sharing the sacraments, and prayer are essential elements in what we are about as holders of faith in Christ. These are gifts that we all take more seriously as we work to forge an ever closer and more faithful community in Christ here at St. Thomas.

1 Peter 1:18 – "You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors."

This word from Peter sounds a bit harsh, but it calls to mind that great phrase from Paul in Romans 12:2 – "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." These two passages speak to the onerous task of the Christian life in our time. We seek to live lives reflecting our community in Christ in a world that values little or nothing of what we value. We are a counter-cultural movement on this earth, seeking to replace greed with giving, hate with love, competition with cooperation, legalism with justice, and selfishness with grace

Luke 24:30-31 – "When he was at table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him..."

It's interesting what can happen in the context of Christian community. The disciples failed to recognize Jesus during their Easter walk on the road to Emmaus, even when they heard him expounding upon God's Word as they had so often during

his life with them. It was only in the breaking of the bread—only in an act of communal significance—only in the action reminiscent of the celebration of the Passover, the Last Supper, or the feeding of the five thousand, that Jesus' true identity was recognized. And the same is true for us. As we celebrate the Lord's Supper together, Jesus is present with us.

Community in Christ should be that to which we devote ourselves in the Church. Too often we fall miserably short; but we can rejoice that there are foretastes of the Kingdom among us. Wherever we see the four elements outlined in Acts (teaching, community, sacraments, and prayer), we begin to recognize Christ as did the disciples on their Easter walk.

There is an anonymous poem, too long for inclusion here in its entirety, that begins like this:

They said, "The Master is coming  
To honor the town today  
And none can tell the house and home  
Where the Master will choose to stay.

One woman immediately set to work to make her house immaculate, in case Jesus should select her home. While she was working, a woman came to the door in heartbreak and sorrow, seeking a sympathetic ear and a comforting word. She was too busy cleaning to be bothered, so she sent the woman away. Next came an aged cripple, weary from his journey, seeking rest by her fireside. Him, too, she turned away. Finally there came a little child:

Sweet, but with marks of teardrops  
And his clothes were ragged and old.  
His hands were bruised and bleeding  
His shivering body cold.

He, too, was turned away. At last the day was ended. The woman cried in her sorrow, "He has entered another door."

Then the Master, it seemed, stood before me  
And his face was grave and fair  
"Three times today I came your way  
And asked for your pity and care.  
Three times today you have sent me away;  
You were too busy to share."

On the Emmaus road, Jesus was the stranger who walked with them, and they did not know him. It was only when they invited him in and shared their home and food with this stranger that he revealed himself to them. Just so, in our sharing of what we

are and what we have with those in need of comfort, food, and help of any kind, does Jesus reveal himself to us.

And when we practice the disciplines of community in Christ (teaching, community, sacraments, and prayer), we may begin to help others recognize Christ through us.

There is a good example of the “one-ness” of Christian believers that can be a part of our witness in Scott Peck’s book, “The Different Drum.”

The story concerns a monastery that had fallen on hard times. There were only five old monks left—the abbot and four brothers, all over seventy years of age. In the woods near the monastery was a hut that was visited from time to time by a rabbi from the nearby town. One day the abbot was led to come to the rabbi to ask his advice for their dying monastery.

The rabbi responded that he had no advice to give. But he did leave the abbot with this strange message: “The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you.”

When the abbot returned to the monastery, his fellow monks gathered around him to ask, “Well, what did the rabbi say?”

“He couldn’t help,” the abbot answered. “We just wept and read the Torah together. The only thing he did say, just as I was leaving—it was something cryptic—was that the Messiah is one of us. I don’t know what he meant.”

In the days and weeks and months that followed, the old monks pondered this and wondered whether there was any possible significance to the rabbi’s words. The Messiah is one of us? Could he possibly have meant one of us monks here at the monastery? If that’s the case, which one? Do you suppose he meant the abbot? Yes, if he meant anyone, he probably meant Father Abbot. He has been our leader for more than a generation.

On the other hand, he might have meant Brother Thomas. Certainly Brother Thomas is a holy man. Everyone knows that Thomas is a man of light.

Certainly he could not have meant Brother Elred! Elred gets crotchety at times. But come to think of it, even though he is a thorn in people’s sides, when you look back on it, Elred is virtually always right. Often very right. Maybe the rabbi did mean brother Elred.

But surely not Brother Phillip. Phillip is so passive, a real nobody. But then, almost mysteriously, he has a gift for somehow always being there when you need him. He just magically appears by your side. Maybe Phillip is the Messiah.

Of course the rabbi didn't mean me. He couldn't possibly have meant me. I'm just an ordinary person. Yet supposing he did? Suppose I am the Messiah? O God, not me. I couldn't be that much for You, could I?

As they contemplated in this manner, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one among them might be the Messiah. And on the off, off chance that each monk himself might be the Messiah, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect.

Because the forest in which it was situated was beautiful, it so happened that people still occasionally came to visit the monastery to picnic on its tiny lawn, to wander along some of its paths, even now and then to go into the dilapidated chapel to meditate. As they did so, without even being conscious of it, they sensed this aura of extraordinary respect that now began to surround the five old monks and seemed to radiate out from them and permeate the atmosphere of the place. There was something strangely attractive, even compelling, about it. Hardly knowing why, they began to come back to the monastery more frequently to picnic, to play, to pray. They began to bring their friends to show them this special place. And their friends brought their friends.

Then it happened that some of the younger men who came to visit the monastery started to talk more and more with the old monks. After a while one asked if he could join them. Then another. And another. So within a few years the monastery had once again become a thriving order and, thanks to the rabbi's gift, a vibrant center of light and spirituality in the realm.

That is what the table of Christ and community in Christ can mean for us as we seek to live in God's kingdom. It's what our Easter walk is all about—treating one another and our neighbor as we would treat Christ. Even valuing ourselves as we would Christ. We are here for three primary reasons: to break the bread of life, which is the Word, to break the bread which is Christ's body, and to share that bread with others. Word, sacrament, and service. Revelation and relationship. These are where humanity and divinity meet, defining who we are and what we are about.

Today we accompany the two followers of Jesus on an Easter walk, proclaiming the Word as we share together in Christian fellowship and worship. We know that the risen Christ is among us. May we treat one another accordingly, for the messiah is in each of us. He makes himself known to us in the breaking of bread, and his presence will transform our community, just as he did so long ago. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord, unto renewed and abundant life. Amen.