

Be known to us in breaking of the bread

Third Sunday of Easter, RCL Year A; Acts 2:14a; 36-41;
Psalm 116:1-3; 10-17; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24: 13-35
St. Matthew's, Sunbury; The Rev. Dina Carter Ishler, Deacon in Charge

*One with each other, Lord, and one in thee
who art one Savior and one living Head;
then open thou our eyes, that we might see:
be known to us in breaking of the bread. Amen.*

As you know, our family will be moving in about ten days and we are in that hard, cluttered part of a moving experience- there are boxes and containers everywhere you look and stuff still to be done in every room. I have been carefully packing up all the beautiful things that have been a part of offering hospitality to others in every place I have ever lived- antique glassware and pretty tablecloths, silver and candlesticks and candy dishes. Because I am an only child who grew up surrounded by much-older relatives and neighbors, most of these items originally belonged to other people and my memories are vivid of all the occasions we shared- Thanksgiving,

Christmas, and Easter dinners, our engagement party, parties after our children's baptisms- I handle them with great tenderness as all the people who have formed me and loved me are a part of them as well. I truly believe this is a large part of why we felt so immediately and deeply at home here at St. Matthew's, because hospitality-faith-based, grace-filled, love-soaked hospitality is one of the love languages of our community and every meal, every coffee hour, every ECW event is centered in God's abiding presence in us and among us.

Eastertide is a season of storytelling: stories of the people who are just beginning to imagine becoming the Body of Christ alive and at work in the world as heard in the Acts of the Apostles, of the different accounts of the post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples. Last Sunday, the second Sunday of Easter, is always about Thomas, who gets so much flack for being a "doubter" but who really longed to know Jesus in an

embodied, even an incarnational way- wanting to know the truth of Jesus' risen self through his physical body as Thomas had known him in every moment of their pre-Resurrection life together. This week, for the Gospel writer Luke, the moment of revealing and true seeing comes as a meal is shared together- in the taking, the blessing, the breaking and the giving of the bread as it was done at Jesus' last supper with his friends. This makes sense to us, because in Luke's Gospel Jesus is most fully Jesus when at a table- what seems like ordinary meals are infused with deeper meaning because the people who gather are being fed in ways that amaze them but they do not yet understand why. It is crucial to Luke's story that these two travelers do not recognize Jesus simply by his presence among them as they journey, or as he "interprets" the scriptures to them (although with the benefit of hindsight they realize how their hearts had been burning within them as they walked along and listened), but around a dinner table, as a meal is blessed and then

shared. This is not yet a “Christian” meal of course- its roots are and will always be fully planted in Jewish table fellowship- but we gather to be fed all these centuries later *because we believe that we too will meet Jesus there and be able to see him, to know him better, to proclaim how he is known to us in the breaking of the bread.*

In every human community that has ever existed, meals at their best allow us to be most fully who we are- and by the best, I don't mean the ones with the fanciest table settings and most elaborate food, although we all know how fun and exciting those meals can be. I mean the meals exactly like this one is described, where we are invited to end our day's journey and nourish our weary bodies, where we urge others to join us and share in what we have to offer, where we take a break from all that the day has demanded of us and regroup so we can face tomorrow. It is there that we can share some of our loveliest gifts- friendship, community, radical hospitality,

fellowship with those we otherwise might not get to know. It is a place to share the stories across generations that shape our little ones and build the memories that become part of us. Meals are also- or they should be- a place where we feel safe enough to let down our guard and share our disappointments, our anger, our heartbreak- knowing they will be safely received and lovingly held. As people of faith, we believe that God is fully present with us in this and every space in our lives- the comfortable and the challenging, the beautiful and the broken places equally holy.

All this should be true as well when we come together to share the Holy Eucharist together, because first and foremost it is a meal. It is a meal offered to people who have gathered to receive it and are hungry for its life-giving nourishment, hungry for everything that is part of it because we believe “Whenever you do this, do this in remembrance of me.” Priest and theologian Henri

Nouwen says that the Eucharist is both the most ordinary and at the same time the most divine gesture imaginable, because this is the truth of the One who gave it to us, himself both human and divine. It is the truth of a God who wants to walk so closely with us that nothing prevents us from recognizing him, so close that we can see him with our own eyes and touch him with our own hands (as Thomas longed to do) and invite him to stay with us when evening is at hand. This is Jesus as Immanuel, God-with-us, pouring himself out so that the fullness of himself- life and ministry and death and resurrection- are known to us when we are fed. As we do when we offer a meal to those we love (but in ways far beyond our human capacities to ever fully comprehend) Jesus says: “Eat and drink, this is for you. There will be more when you need it, take it, it will strengthen your body and feed your soul. I want you to know the wholeness that comes from sharing this meal together, because I love you.”

In her book “Take this bread” author Sara Miles puts it like this: *“At the table, breaking bread, we share in the ongoing work of making creation whole.”* Like these two travelers, when we are fed and our eyes are opened, we see God’s longing for us made visible in the world around us. We see what is holy and good and true in each of us and can greet and honor each other as beloved. We recognize both the intimacy and the vastness of our union with God and each other and all that can mean for God’s creation. *In the Eucharist, we recognize the fullness of who we are and who we may yet become as God’s beloved children- believing that God has given us life through Christ Jesus and that we are called to spread this life throughout the world.* The Eucharist is the place from which all life flows- we are fed, we are changed, we share how we have been changed with others, we come back again and again because we will always be hungry for this true and living bread.

This is a powerful and tender conversation for me as all my longing through the years of steadfast and often deeply challenging discernment- and the guiding of the Holy Spirit- have brought me to this very place and to serve among you: where the fullest truth of who we are as holy community will be known to us as we gather here together to be fed. We come because we are hungry, and we bring all of ourselves- our hopes, our longings, all our hurt places and we lay them down at the altar, trusting that God will always beckon us towards wholeness and newness of life. And from this fullness- from all that was and is and ever will be- we will take ourselves out into the world beyond our doors so that others too might see Jesus, crucified and risen, as alive among us and always feeding us with life-giving mercy, grace and love. This, my beloveds, is my deepest hope for us- and I think the words of Eucharistic Prayer C, which we will say shortly, say it best:

“Lord God of our Fathers: God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us.

Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal. *Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name. Risen Lord, be known to us in the breaking of the Bread. Amen.*