

Sermon 4 26 20

“Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

“Risen Lord, be *known* to us in the breaking of the bread.”

That last sentence is from Eucharistic Prayer C in our Book of Common Prayer. The words are said by everyone, “Risen Lord, be known to us in the breaking of the bread.”

We don’t use prayer C very often because it’s longer, but I can assure you, if we were able to celebrate the Eucharist together this Sunday, with responsive voices, we would be using Prayer C. We will return to Prayer C at least once when we rejoin in joy after this horrible pandemic is conquered - and it will be!

(By the way, you may know Prayer C better as the space age prayer!)

And how about “joining together,” huh? Don’t we miss being in church together? I sure do! That is what is so wonderful about our worship. It’s something we do *together* — and I miss that! A lot of us miss that. I’ve heard many of you say it. One parishioner recently told me how she missed sitting together with everyone - praying together - responding in unison - singing together — *just being together*.

It’s called corporate worship. And let us never again underestimate the value of corporate worship - that’s what it’s called, but you can also think it as collective worship - where we share worship collectively with each other.

But first, in our efforts to understand corporate worship, let us acknowledge that we humans have different ways of comprehending things. Sometimes we learn with our memories. Sometimes we recall things with or because of our senses. How many of us just “know,” after years of driving, how to drive? How to make a turn? In the theater, this type of recalling is known as “sense memory.” You put your hands on the steering wheel and you just know what to do.

Have you ever smelled a really good spaghetti sauce cooking, and it reminds you, as if it happened yesterday, of a really good dinner? Maybe a Friday night family dinner? Or a special dinner out with a special friend?

This is a sense memory. I know an actor who goes over his lines before every performance by going onstage an hour or so ahead of time and walking through his part in the play - every move he makes - every gesture. That repetition puts his lines not only in his memory, but also in his body, in his bones - sealing them there. Repeating one gesture can recall a whole speech.

When we repeat the Pledge of Allegiance together, what does it recall? Standing together, next to our school desks, raising our right hands to place over our left breasts, lifting our heads to gaze at the flag and adding our voices to other voices to pledge allegiance - to what? To a flag? No, not really. We are actually pledging allegiance to our country. We are standing because we respect the words we are saying. And our investment in the Pledge increases as we repeat not only the words, but the posture and gestures we use when we say them.

When we repeat the Nicene Creed and the Lord's Prayer during every Liturgy, we are also standing, respectfully reaffirming our faith - every time, EVERY time we repeat those words together.

When I hold my hands out and open and apart, it's a gesture of welcome. You are *all* welcome at the table. Even when we're miles apart. Think how different it would be if I held my hands out, but with my fists curled and closed. My whole *self* would be closed off to you.

When Jesus walked with the two disciples to Emmaus, he knew he appeared to be a stranger. He knew that throughout their whole meal together he appeared to be just another guy, a stranger who was maybe becoming a friend. When they reached the village they were stopping at, he seemed ready to continue his journey, but they liked him! They wanted to spend more time with him! So, "They urged him strongly," the Bible tells us, to remain with them.

Then they all went in and sat at a table together. "He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them." And that's all it took! Their eyes were opened. Soooo simple. Is it any wonder that we priests are called to repeat this gesture again and again? If you were sitting at a table and the bread basket was passed to someone, and they took out a piece of bread and tore it and passed part of it on to you, would something inside of you say, "Oh,

that's like communion!?" I think you would probably feel that sense of recognition. We know Jesus in the breaking of the bread. That is how strong that simple gesture is.

I remember, in Seminary, we were moving through the worship services of Holy Week and one of the sacristans, the people in charge of the Sacristy (we didn't have an Altar Guild per se), forgot to order enough of the bigger wafers for celebrating the Eucharist. And they ran out just in time for the professor of liturgics to be celebrating! Oops! Big oops!

So there she was, and she came to the point of breaking the bread, the wafer, and there was no larger wafer! Aack! And we could all see it. And she just picked up one of the little wafers and she fractioned it with just as much a sense of gravity and worship as any other priest would a big wafer. And it worked! Of course it worked! Because Jesus becomes known to us in the breaking of the bread, no matter how big or little the bread is!

Once, I sat in a Sunday School room, and I was watching a little boy repeating the gestures of the Eucharist (he didn't know I was watching) at a child sized altar set aside for Sunday School. He remembered and went through the whole Eucharistic Prayer. And he broke the bread as profoundly as any priest I've ever seen. He knew what he was doing. And he inhabited that gesture fully. He filled it.

Now, during our time of fasting from the Eucharist, imagine yourself in this room, praying with devotion, watching raptly as we all participate and add to the blessings of the Eucharist. You don't need to be here. You don't even need to have piece of bread in your hands. But somehow you *are* here. And Jesus Christ becomes *known* to you.