

Sermon: *In the Breaking of the Bread*
Text: *Luke 24:13 – 35*
Date: *April 6, 2008 AM*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

There was once a man named Saul of Tarsus. Now, Saul was a righteous man, a Pharisee. He was a religious man and kept the Law of Moses with strict observance. And then, one day as Saul was traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus to persecute the Church there, suddenly a bright light shined down upon him and he fell to the ground. And he heard a voice say, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And Saul said: "Who are you?" And the voice answered: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." On that day, Saul of Tarsus had an encounter with the Risen Christ that changed his life forever.

Where do we encounter the Risen Christ? On that first Easter Sunday, Mary came busting into the room with startling news: the stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty, the body is missing, and two angels appeared announcing Jesus' resurrection. But the disciples didn't believe her. In fact, Peter and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves.

And that same day, two of Jesus' disciples were on their way from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus about 7 miles away. And as they walked along, they began to talk about the events of the previous week: the Triumphal Entry, the Cleansing of the Temple, the Last Supper, the Arrest, and the Suffering and Death of Jesus. And suddenly, a Stranger joined them on their journey and He asked them: "What are you talking about?" They said: "Are you the only one who doesn't know what has happened in Jerusalem this week?" And they told Him all about how their Lord had been arrested and crucified and how the ladies had found the tomb empty. And they even admitted their despair; they said: "And we had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel."

So the Stranger started with the scriptures and began to explain to them how the Messiah must suffer and die and be raised from the dead. And since they were getting close to home and it was getting late in the day, they invited the Stranger to spend the night with them. And that night, as they sat down to eat supper, the Stranger took the bread, gave thanks for it, and broke it. And suddenly, their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus. And He immediately vanished from their sight. So they ran back to Jerusalem and found the other disciples and told them about their experience on the way home to Emmaus and how they had encountered the Risen Lord and how He had been known to them "in the breaking of the bread."

I believe Luke is telling us something very significant in these verses, something that was significant to the early Church and something that is significant for you and me! It is simply the answer to my original question this morning: where do we encounter the Risen Christ? You see, the proclamation of the Church for nearly 2000 years has been: Christ has died;

Christ has risen; and Christ can be experienced. But where, where do we encounter the Risen Christ? Well, I believe these verses tell us the Risen Christ can be experienced in two ways:

1. WE EXPERIENCE THE RISEN CHRIST IN HIS WORD!

Verse 27 says: *“Then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them the things about Himself in all the scriptures.”* As they walked along toward Emmaus, Jesus took the Old Testament, the Torah and the writings of the Prophets, and explained the scriptures to them and looked what happened. Verse 32 says: *“They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while He was talking to us on the road, while He was opening the scriptures to us?’”*

You see, I believe something special happens in the reading and preaching of God’s Word. In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, when the people were trying to re-establish worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, Ezra called a sacred assembly and read the Book of the Law aloud. And Nehemiah 8:9 says: *“All the people wept when they heard the word of the Law.”*

When the scripture is read and proclaimed in our private and corporate worship, we encounter Christ! It was while Jesus was explaining the scripture that the disciples had a heart-warming experience, because the Word of God penetrated their hearts.

John Wesley searched for a relationship with God most of his young life. He was religious, but he wasn’t saved! He preached Christ, but he didn’t know Christ. But on May 24, 1738, at a prayer meeting on Aldersgate Street while someone was reading Martin Luther’s Preface to the Book of Romans, suddenly John Wesley had an encounter with Christ. And he wrote in his journal, *“I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”* You see, the very heart-beat of Methodism is an encounter with Christ in Scripture.

We experience the Risen Christ in scripture.

2. WE EXPERIENCE THE RISEN CHRIST AT HIS TABLE!

Verse 30 says: *“When He was at the table with them, He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him.”* And when they found the other disciples, *“They told what had happened to them on the road and how He had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”*

Now, I’m not really sure what happened to those early disciples. Did they see the holes in His hands? Did they just recognize the way He broke the bread? I don’t know! But I do know that something significant happens when we break the bread! Somehow, mysteriously, unexpectedly, Christ reveals Himself to us. John Wesley put it this way: *“Is not the eating of that*

bread and the drinking of that cup, the outward visible means whereby God conveys into our souls all that spiritual grace, that righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost ... let all, therefore, who truly desire the grace of God eat of that bread and drink of that cup."

You see, as Methodists, we believe that something significant happens at the altar. Holy Communion is a time to remember Jesus' death and resurrection ... but it is more than that. Holy Communion is a way for the Church to proclaim Jesus' death and resurrection until He comes again ... but it is more than that. Holy Communion is an encounter with the Risen Christ, an opportunity to have our eyes opened so that we might see Christ!

One Sunday morning, Sue walked into the sanctuary and saw that the Table was set up for Holy Communion. And she thought to herself, "*Not today! I just don't understand why we have to go through this same old ritual every month.*" And she thought about leaving for a minute, but she couldn't. So, she listened to the pastor's sermon about the importance of Holy Communion and then, in a moment of silence, she bowed her head and said this prayer: "*Oh God, I'm tired of going through the motions on Communion Sunday. Please make Communion come alive for me; help me to understand it and help me to experience you in it.*" A few minutes later, the usher tapped her on the shoulder and she went forth and knelt at the altar. She took the bread and she took the cup and suddenly, tears began to flow down her face. Right there in front of God and everybody Sue was weeping uncontrollably. She said: "*Suddenly a warmth moved through me that I cannot explain and I knew that Christ was present with me, that He loved me, forgave me, and accepted me as His own.*"

We experience the Risen Christ at His Table!

In the Word and at the Table! This has been the pattern for worship in the Church for 2000 years. We hear God's love for us proclaimed through His Word and then, we see it enacted before us in the breaking of the bread! Word and Table ... that's how we encounter the Risen Christ and that's how we as United Methodists Worship!

Let us pray!