

The Breaking of The Bread

a sermon by Pastor D. Thomas Ford, Jr.
Salem Lutheran Church
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Luke 24:

[13] That very day two of them were going to a village named Emma'us, about seven miles from Jerusalem,

[14] and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

[15] While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.

[16] But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

[17] And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad.

[18] Then one of them, named Cle'opas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

[19] And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,

[20] and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.

[21] But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened.

[22] Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning

[23] and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.

[24] Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see."

[25] And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

[26] Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

[27] And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

[28] So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further,

[29] but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day

is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. [30] When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.

[31] And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight.

[32] They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"

[33] And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them,

[34] who said, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"

[35] Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

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Grace be unto you, and peace, from God Our Father and Our Resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus The Christ!

Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church, my last parish in Ashtabula, Ohio, was established in 1891 by Finns. Each month Nissu bakers would take over the church kitchen for a day and bake 400 loaves of Nissu to sell to raise money for the church. (Nissu is the Finnish sweet bread baked with cardamon seed.) If you lived in the town and had never been to the church on a day when the Nissu bakers were baking and had never smelled the aroma wafting throughout the building, well, you were simply sensorially impoverished.

Smelling Nissu being baked would always elicit another smell for me. When I was a young boy growing up on our North Carolina farm, Saturday mornings took me as close to heaven as you can get in this life. Just as I was getting up, my Grandma Ford would have a batch of Light Bread coming out of the oven. The seductive smell permeated the house with the full force of a stage 5 Kansas tornado. I would sit in my pajamas, eating one Light Bread hot roll with butter and jelly right after another. As Emeril would say, "To die for!"

Now, in case you're wondering what this Light (L-I-G-H-T) Bread is: it's a Southern term for bread made with wheat flour and leavened with yeast, rather than unleavened bread made with cornmeal. "Light" refers not to the color of the bread, but to the yeast that "lightens" it.

Every Southern boy and girl learned something about Light Bread very early. While it was in the oven, you had better not slam doors or make any loud noises, or the bread would be ruined. Another Southern boy, Sam Elmore, puts it this way: "When

Mama decided to bake Light-Bread, she announced it to all concerned at the breakfast table; and closely followed with a threat of mayhem to anyone who came within a quarter-mile of her kitchen while she was baking.”

My Grandma’s recipe for Light Bread existed only in her head. Her yeast came from grated potatoes. Every Saturday morning for years she and my mom baked enough Light Bread, pies, custards, and cakes to last for a week. But the main item for me as a young boy on Saturday mornings was the Light Bread. I remember the smell of it as the angelic call to arise and eat.

While Grandma was still able to bake, we always had Light Bread. She had grown up in an era and culture that insisted that you did not have a meal unless bread was present. I even once saw her eat ice cream with bread.

Now, I’m sure you can tell your own stories involving bread. And I’m sure you know how the word “companion” evolved: com = with – panis = bread. Those people you break bread with are your companions.

I can still see our family at the table and the Light Bread tray being passed. Each of us would take a piece. Each of us would break it in his or her own way. I can see my Dad reaching for a piece of it. There was a certain way he would break it that was unique. Let me tell you: if you put a thousand pairs of hands behind curtains and then had all the pairs extended, just the hands, each with a loaf of bread, and then said, “Break the loaves,” I could show you immediately which pair of hands belonged to my Dad by the way he broke the bread.

Have you ever paid attention to how each person in your family breaks bread? Each does it differently.

Jesus and his companions broke bread together a lot. Among themselves. And with large crowds. They did it together so often, with Jesus as their leader, and with his breaking the bread first, that they could recognize his unique way of breaking bread at any time and in any place.

At the Last Supper Jesus had with his companions before his body was broken for them and us and the world, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them saying, “Take and eat. This is my Body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” Only after his death and resurrection and a lot of teaching could his companions fully understand what Jesus had said. But the very minute those two companions at the

table with The Stranger at Emmaus saw those hands – those hands – break the bread that way – that Way – , they knew who he was!

Each time we come together as companions with Our Lord and Savior Companion at His Lord's Table, with Him as Host and hear the Words of Institution, and either see or hear the Bread break, each of us instantly recognizes Him through the eyes of faith. He is the One we call The Bread of Life whose Body was broken for us. Whose broken Body was Raised for us.

God has a very unique way of breaking The Bread of Life for us. We recognize it instantly each time we see The Cross, which is the symbol for Jesus Our Lord's Death and Resurrection. We recognize it each time we eat and drink the Bread and Wine at Holy Communion.

Pope John Paul II spoke of today's Gospel, "It is significant that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, duly prepared by our Lord's words, recognized him at table through the simple gesture of the 'breaking of bread'. When minds are enlightened and hearts are enkindled, signs begin to 'speak'. The Eucharist unfolds in a dynamic context of signs containing a rich and luminous message. Through these signs the mystery in some way opens up before the eyes of the believer."¹

And yet, as much as we take pride in our faith in recognizing God's unique way of breaking The Bread of Life for us in Jesus' Death and Resurrection, we also believe something else about the breaking of the bread that is equally important. Are you listening? We also believe something else about the breaking of the bread that is equally important.

"... bread ... must be broken because, until it is broken, it cannot be shared, and until it is shared, it cannot be received, and until it is received, it cannot produce a blessing."² This means, dear Salem companions, "the church is meant to be such broken bread through which the world comes to see, through which each one of us

¹ Mane Nobiscum Domine (Remain With Us, Lord), Apostolic Letter of The Holy Father to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful for The Year of The Eucharist October 2004 - October 2005
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20041008_mane-nobiscum-domine_en.html John Paul II

² Lutheran Pastor Gunnar L. Anderson
http://homepage.mac.com/netchemistwb/Sermon_4_21_96.html

comes to see through the other, the presence of the Risen Christ!”³

Our lives together now as God’s companions in this world in this community are so to be broken in selfless service that this world around us here in Glendale comes to see the Risen Christ!

Further reflecting on this same understanding, John Paul II continued, “I think for example of the tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the diseases which afflict developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardships faced by the unemployed, the struggles of immigrants. These are evils which are present—albeit to a different degree—even in areas of immense wealth. We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (cf. *Jn* 13:35; *Mt* 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.”⁴

And so, we visit and support the sick and disabled and care for the dying and bereaved and the troubled. We feed the hungry and homeless. We support missionaries in Africa. We provide quilts and personal health and individual school kits for Lutheran World Relief. We support a parish nurse to address health issues for homebound members. We support the New City Parish and Solheim Lutheran Home. We deliver gifts and give money to support The Salvation Army. We receive special offerings for tsunami and cancer victims. In all these ways and more The Risen Christ is revealed.

Yes, God has a very unique way of breaking The Bread of Life. We recognize it instantly each time we see The Cross, which is the symbol for Jesus Our Lord’s Death and Resurrection. We recognize it instantly each time we come to Holy Communion. And others are being taught to recognize it instantly as we repetitively offer ourselves in serving others as our Risen Companion told us to do, especially the hurting and the hungry and the poor.

The Breaking of The Bread. Why, we can recognize His unique way of doing it at any time and in any place! Don’t you agree!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

³ Ibid.

⁴ John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*.