

## **Setting the Table**

### **People of the Resurrection #4**

**Luke 24:13-35**

Good Morning Sisters and Brothers, it's good to be together this morning. A warm welcome to those of you who are joining us online. Even though you're not able to be with us in person, we remember you and we pray for you.

This morning will be the final sermon in our People of the Resurrection Series. We've been spending the month of May talking about how the Resurrection changes us, and how we can live into the reality that Jesus is alive. We've been using some of the stories from the Gospels after Jesus had risen to help shape our imaginations around this idea.

Our story for this week (which was a very long one, thank you Carrol for reading that!) finds two men journeying to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. These men are followers of Jesus, but neither are one of the 11 disciples. This is all taking place on Easter Sunday, the afternoon of the same day that Jesus had risen. The two men are talking about everything that has happened, from the crucifixion, the burial and now the astonishing news of the resurrection that the women had brought this morning. The two men are sad, aching, trying to make sense of what has happened, perhaps if they talk it through, process it together, then the pieces will fall into place, then everything will make sense. As they walk that dusty road, engrossed in

conversation, a stranger approaches them. It's Jesus, though they do not yet realize it. He falls in step with the men, asks them what they're discussing. Flabbergasted to find a single soul in the city of Jerusalem who doesn't know what happened, who doesn't know what is being discussed at every marketplace, every water well, every doorway. So, they tell Jesus everything- from how Jesus of Nazareth was a powerful prophet, how the chief priests arranged for his drummed up charges which led to his murder, and now, most shocking of all the story of the women, finding his tomb empty and angels reported that he had risen. The men are sad, confused as they tell Jesus the story.

Jesus rebukes the men, though I don't think unkindly, this is the same critique he offered to his closest disciples many times, and then he opens the scriptures to them, he tells them how all that has happened fits with what the Old Testament Prophets foretold. Beginning with the story of Moses and walking them through the Scriptures, Jesus lays out for them the truth that he is the Messiah, the one they have been waiting for.

The trio reaches their destination in Emmaus and Jesus prepares to walk on alone. Evening has arrived and the two men insist that Jesus comes to their house to stay. This man has been so generous in his teaching of the scriptures, the least they can do is offer him a meal and place to sleep for the night. Jesus accept their hospitality, they prepare a meal and sit down to eat together. They ask this wise stranger to break the bread, to give thanks to God for their meal. Jesus does so- verses 30-32 of chapter 24, "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 he vanished from

their sight. 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?”

Forgetting their meal, food and dishes abandoned where they were, the men returned to Jerusalem as quickly as possible to find the disciples and tell them about their walk, their meal with the Risen Jesus. They find the disciples gathered together, saying Yes, Jesus has risen and he even appeared to Simon. The two men add their story to the gathering evidence, to the growing excitement, verse 35, “Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

What strikes me as particularly interesting about this story is how they don't realize at first that they are walking alongside Jesus. Is this another case of confusion caused by stress? Like when Mary mistakes Jesus for the Gardener at the tomb. Possibly.

Compounding the strangeness of the story is how even when Jesus “opens the scriptures” to them, putting together all the pieces, laying out the trail of breadcrumbs how Jesus is the Messiah, is risen from the dead, and this was all part of what the prophets foretold, the men still don't see Jesus. It's almost as if Jesus is playing a game of basketball, waving his arm and shouting, “Over here guys! I'm right here!” What's going on here?

Verse 35 of chapter 24 says this, “Then they told the disciples what had happened on the road and how he, Jesus, had been made known to them in the breaking of the

bread.” Made known in the breaking of the bread. It’s there, at table, surrounded by food, company and hospitality that the two men finally realize that Jesus is in their midst. I don’t think that this timing is coincidental. Luke makes an effort to show readers that there is something important about the WHEN of Jesus’ true identity being revealed. Notice what Luke writes in verse 30-31, “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 he vanished from their sight” and then the same sequence of events is mentioned in verse 35, “Then they told the disciples what had happened on the road and how he, Jesus, had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. Their moment comes not through scripture, but through an encounter at the table that they see Jesus. It’s as though knowing ABOUT Jesus isn’t enough, one must encounter Jesus to see him. And where does that encounter happen? At the Table.

In the pre-pandemic days, I was part of a panel discussion on communion at the 2019 Equipping Days with Josh Wallace and Garth Ewert Fisher. In his time, Josh shared about how it was the way of doing communion together that brought him into the fold of Anabaptist, how they became Mennonite back in their time in Chicago. Dr. David Fitch, building off of the work of other Anabaptist theologians says this, “The Table teaches us to be present to Jesus and others through the postures of confession and submission. We confess our sin to God and others. We submit ourselves to God as King and His Kingdom, as well as submit ourselves to others out of reverence to that King (Ephesians 5:21). The Table cannot truly be practiced alone. It opens space for God to work

between and among a group of people. And as we learn to be present to Him among us here on Sunday, we can be present to Him at work in all the tables of our lives as we eat the rest of the week.” For early Anabaptists, meeting Jesus at the table wasn’t about some mystically encounter, some magical moment when Jesus revealed himself, Jesus was already there, sitting at the table. We meet Jesus in the other faces around the table, in this place of care and love towards the guest. In those small acts of love and hospitality, just like the one’s performed by the two men on the road to Emmaus.

At that panel discussion, after Josh shared, one pastor asked a question. “So Josh, the way you’re talking about communion, you make it sound like every meal is a communion meal.” And Josh lit up, “Yes!” Now, obviously, there’s room in our faith for different ideas about communion, but Josh’s idea intrigued me. If we believe the presence of the Risen Jesus is with us always, then he’s always at the table. Always at coffee row. Always at potlucks and picnics, and school lunch tables. Always ready to reveal himself, just as he did in the breaking of the bread to those two men over 2,000 years ago.

So, as People of the Resurrection, what is our role in this story? How do we make space for the Risen Jesus to reveal himself in our lives and, most especially, in the lives of our neighbors? I propose that we, the church, need to set the table wide. We need to set the table wide with welcome, wide with hospitality, wide with the love of Jesus.

Isaiah 54 presents this beautiful vision of the house of God being filled to the seams, bursting with people from all nations, “Sing, O childless woman,

you who have never given birth!

Break into loud and joyful song, O Jerusalem,

you who have never been in labor.

For the desolate woman now has more children

than the woman who lives with her husband,”

says the Lord.

“Enlarge your house; build an addition.

Spread out your home, and spare no expense!

For you will soon be bursting at the seams.

Your descendants will occupy other nations

and resettle the ruined cities.”

Practically speaking, what are some ways that we can set the table wide?

First, we can turn our attention towards our neighbours. We can take notice of the things going on in their lives, take notice of what their needs may be, and take time to connect. I've seen this gift time and time again in our church- I think there's a real sense of neighborliness in our church. I hear your stories of looking after one another's kids, stories of lending and borrowing, stories of hospitality. I want to honor that and affirm that hospitality is spiritual practice and spiritual gift. When I first began considering ministry, I had to fill out what's called the Ministry Leader Intake form for Mennonite

Church Canada- The MLI. One of the questions at that time was to name three spiritual practices that are important in your own life. I listed hospitality as one of mine-to host, to cook and serve food, to create spaces of welcome and rest is something that I love (something that has been a challenge for me to return to post-pandemic). Garth Ewert-Fisher, who read over my MLI as part of my entrance interview, said it was the first MLI that he's ever read where someone listed hospitality as spiritual practice. I don't tell the story to toot my own horn, but rather to say that hospitality in our church and in our homes has a definite spiritual dimension to it. Hospitality opens up space for the presence of Jesus to be revealed, just as it happened at the table in that home in Emmaus.