
Take, Bless, Break, Give: Again and Again

A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Third Sunday of Easter – Year A

*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.
(Luke 24:30–31)*

Take, bless, break give.

It had happened at the last supper of Jesus with his disciples. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and even Saint Paul would remember and record those words. And now it was happening again.

The walk of Jesus, from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, to that last supper, to his horrifying execution, to a mysterious rising from the dead – that walk—was continuing. Just days after his bitter betrayal and crucifixion, and just a few days after stories began to circulate that Jesus had risen from the dead, while the world moved in a stupor of empire and wandering, two disciples of this Jesus were walking away from Jerusalem.

They were walking on the Emmaus Road. Like us, they were on a journey. Like us when we travel, they were talking about current events. They could have been walking down Peachtree Road. They could have been in a car on the interstate. They could have been in an airplane leaving the airport.

A stranger joined them on the journey, just like a stranger might come and sit beside us on the subway, or on the airplane; and this stranger joins the conversation. He asks about this Jesus character.

“Yeah,” said one, “and we thought he was the one who would get our country back together.” The three of them talked about God. They talked about scripture; the stranger was rather helpful.

In the Emmaus Road story, the two disciples decided to stop for the night. They invited their conversation partner to join them. At supper, the stranger took some bread, blessed the bread, broke the bread, and gave the bread to the small group.

At that moment on the Emmaus Road, the two disciples were astounded! It was Jesus himself! The Emmaus stranger had been simply a stranger. He was a stranger until he took, blessed, broke, gave. He took the bread and did the same thing with it that we do here in church every Sunday: he took, blessed, broke, and gave. It was holy communion, with Jesus.

I believe it was *the way* the stranger took. It was the way he took the bread. He took as if he were receiving.

That is the way of Jesus. Jesus takes as if he is gently receiving. Jesus takes people, too. It is not a grabbing or a seizing. It is a receiving. “Come to me,” he says, “you who are weary and heavy-laden.”

Jesus takes bread because the bread wants so deeply to come to him. Jesus takes us, but only when we are ready, ready to give ourselves over to those strong and tender hands. It was *the way* the stranger took bread on the Emmaus Road; and the two disciples began to see Jesus.

Then, secondly, Jesus blessed the food. It was *the way* he blessed. To bless is to speak good words. Jesus spoke good words over the bread, words of remembrance and thanksgiving. Jesus spread remembrance and thanks all over that bread, like butter on a biscuit. Jesus spreads remembrance and thanksgiving all over us, too, as if we are being covered by holy oil.

It was *the way* Jesus spoke, *the way* Jesus blessed. "I will offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving." The blessing of Jesus touches the world with remembrance and thanks, not judgement or fear. The way of Jesus is holy remembrance and sacred thanks and joyful hope. When the Emmaus disciples saw the way the stranger blessed, they began to recognize Jesus.

Then, thirdly, Jesus broke the bread. Yes, Jesus breaks something. To break something sounds destructive, but Jesus does not destroy. *The way* Jesus breaks is not a violent breaking. It is the breaking of dispersion, so that one body can become several individual bodies. It is the breaking of maturity and self-individuation. It is like the break of an umbilical cord, providing independent life. The breaking can feel severe, but it is not violent and destructive.

It is a breaking that enlarges us. It is a breaking that enlarges the realm of God. It is a breaking that enlarges the glory of God. *The way* of Jesus is a gentle breaking that actually enlarges the Body of Christ.

Finally, Jesus gave that blessed and broken bread to the Emmaus disciples. Their eyes were opened. They recognized Jesus because they had been nourished by the taking and blessing and breaking. Jesus gives blessed nourishment. *The way* of Jesus is to give.

Jesus gives us blessed nourishment, too. For sure. But Jesus also actually *gives us*. Jesus gives us, as renewed parts of the body, to the world. Jesus seems always to be giving, giving away.

Yes, Jesus even gives us away. That doesn't mean he no longer wants us, or that we are no longer a part of Jesus. We are given away by Jesus in order to be his identity in the world, to be his energy in the world, to be his love in the world.

This is what happened to the Emmaus Road disciples. In that beautiful four-fold action of "Taking, Blessing, Breaking, Giving," they suddenly recognized Jesus. They were recognizing the way of Jesus: to take, bless, break, and give.

"Come to me, you are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

Then they, too, remembered, "Didn't our hearts burn when he talked about scripture? They told the story to others. It finally got written down in the Gospel of Luke, that two disciples had not recognized Jesus until he had explained scripture and blessed bread. The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in scripture and the breaking of bread.

That is the power of the Emmaus Road story. No matter what roads we are walking in this life. No matter whether it is Emmaus Road or Peachtree Road; the Downtown Connector or the Perimeter, Georgia 400 or U.S. Highway 66. It may be the soccer practice road, the business road, the school road, the MARTA line, the bus route, the airplane trip to our next job. And it doesn't matter which house we are living in, or which hotel we are staying in, or which restaurant, where the bread is broken.

When we are Christians, any road can be the Emmaus Road. When we are Christians, the Emmaus Road will lead to the breaking of bread in holy communion somewhere. The road turns into an Emmaus Road when we take, bless, break, and give.

Maybe we do not recognize Jesus at first. Maybe we think that this fellow traveler is just a stranger. Maybe our fellow traveler is someone we thought we knew quite well: our despondent spouse, our cranky child, our weird business associate. If we make scripture and the holy breaking of bread part of our journey, our fellow traveler can become Christ among us.

The roads that all of us walk are filled with grief and hope, chagrin and joy, strangers and friends. But when someone shows us the holy way, the way of holy taking, holy blessing, holy breaking, holy giving – then we are with Jesus. Christ is risen when Jesus shows up in scripture and the holy breaking of bread, and then he shows up again in scripture and the breaking of bread, and again and again! Christ is risen!

AMEN.

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