

Recognizing the Living Christ Every Day

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher
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April 21, 2019—Easter

- Matthew 28:1-8 (Good News Translation) ¹After the Sabbath, as Sunday morning was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ²Suddenly there was a violent earthquake; an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the stone away, and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The guards were so afraid that they trembled and became like dead men. ⁵The angel spoke to the women. "You must not be afraid," he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has been raised, just as he said. Come here and see the place where he was lying. ⁷Go quickly now, and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from death, and now he is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him!' Remember what I have told you." ⁸So they left the tomb in a hurry, afraid and yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.
- Luke 24:13-35 (Good News Translation) ¹³On that same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and they were talking to each other about all the things that had happened. ¹⁵As they talked and discussed, Jesus himself drew near and walked along with them; ¹⁶they saw him, but somehow did not recognize him. ¹⁷Jesus said to them, "What are you talking about to each other, as you walk along?" They stood still, with sad faces. ¹⁸One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have been happening there these last few days?" ¹⁹"What things?" he asked. "The things that happened to Jesus of Nazareth," they answered. "This man was a prophet and was considered by God and by all the people to be powerful in everything he said and did. ²⁰Our chief priests and rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and he was crucified. ²¹And we had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free! Besides all that, this is now the third day since it happened. ²²Some of the women of our group surprised us; they went at dawn to the tomb, ²³but could not find his body. They came back saying they had seen a vision of angels who told them that he is alive. ²⁴Some of our group went to the tomb and found it exactly as the women had said, but they did not see him." ²⁵Then Jesus said to them, "How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said! ²⁶Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then to enter his glory?" ²⁷And Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets. ²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther; ²⁹but they held him back, saying, "Stay with us; the day is almost over and it is getting dark." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰He sat down to eat with them, took the bread, and said the blessing; then he broke the bread and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. ³²They said to each other, "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" ³³They got up at once and went back to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven disciples gathered together with the others ³⁴and saying, "The Lord is risen indeed! He has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵The two then explained to them what had happened on the road, and how they had recognized the Lord when he broke the bread.
- Sermon-in-a-sentence: Every day we are to remember and follow and serve the Risen Christ.

We're here today because of a Bible story. One story told four different times, with slight variations by each writer. What the four versions have in common is the assertion that Jesus of Nazareth was the embodiment of divinity in the form of humanity. He proclaimed God's unconditional love for all; not only did he proclaim it, he lived it. Jesus didn't accept the common belief that some people are deserving of God's love but others aren't. His openness, his grace was a powerful message—a message that felt intimidating and threatening to some of the people in power in religious and political and civic circles. They thought they could end his threat by ending Jesus. He was unjustly convicted, cruelly killed, his body laid to rest in a tomb on one day, and on the third day the tomb was found to be empty because

Jesus had been raised from absolute death to real life. Resurrection. God will not be stopped. Not even physical death is an obstacle for God.

Because of that story we're here. Because of that story people filling tens of thousands of churches and chapels and cathedrals around the world call themselves Christ-followers – Christians. With our lives we seek to follow the Christ, the Messiah, the chosen, anointed one of God.

Can I explain the resurrection? No. No one knows precisely what happened or how.

- Was Jesus raised from death to life precisely at midnight, or at sunrise, or as soon as the tomb was sealed on Friday?
- Did his body levitate and somehow fly out a ventilation hole in the top of the tomb?
- Or did it happen like in the TV show "I Dream of Jeannie" with Jesus becoming a vapor and wafting out of the room?
- Or was it more like the TV show "Bewitched" where, in the blink of an eye and with a wiggle of the nose, he disappeared from within the tomb and immediately reappeared elsewhere?

Who can explain it? I can't, but I know it happened somehow. There are a lot of things I can't explain but that I know to be true. For instance, I can't explain how my osteopathic physician is able to treat my springtime allergies without any medicines or needle scratches or restrictions to diet or activities, but she does. There are a lot of things I can't explain but that I know to be true.

I remind you that the four gospel accounts are not exactly the same. Only two of the four stories have Jesus appearing to the women outside the empty tomb on that first Easter morning. Luke's gospel does tell a story about Jesus appearing to two people later that afternoon. [See text of Luke 24:13-35 above.]

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The travelers on the road to Emmaus recognized the living Christ – even risen from the dead! – when he dined with them and offered a blessing which involved the literal breaking of bread. We recognize Jesus in the breaking of bread. "Breaking bread" is a metaphor for a religious ritual celebrated by Christians everywhere – what we usually call communion or the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist.

But "breaking bread" is also a term that simply refers to eating – especially eating with others.

"Breaking bread" is something we do every day... several times every day. Some grumbling tummies right now might be anticipating a time of "breaking bread" to follow this service.

This story reminds us that we can remember

the way of Jesus

the example of Jesus

the call of Jesus

as frequently as whenever we "break bread." Every day of our lives, whenever we break bread, we can remember that Jesus is alive now,

that Jesus is alive in us,

that Jesus is relying on us:

- to continue his mission of being merciful;
- continuing his mission of standing up for what is just;
- continuing his mission of protecting the powerless;
- continuing his mission of accepting and respecting all persons;
- striving to follow his example by loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, strength.

Mr. and Mrs. Cleopas thought that their Sunday evening meal would be like any other, except for the fact that they were hosting a new acquaintance as a guest. But in the breaking of bread they recognized that Jesus who died was alive – God had raised him to new life.

Although the resurrection broke into history at a specific time and place long ago and far away, the resurrection is not the property of the past. [The resurrection is] God's future showing itself in our present; it belongs to all times and seasons.... Jesus is not over, and his story is not over.¹ Whenever we break bread – every single day of our lives! – by everything we *say* and *do* and *are* we are called to remember Jesus and follow his example and serve others with his generosity and grace.

[sermons: se20190421; © 2019 Jon M. Fancher]

¹ Jim Friedrich, "Preaching on Easter Sunday isn't about convincing people: Resurrection isn't something we explain. It's something we live and breathe." *Christian Century*, April 3, 2019 at <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/opinion/preaching-easter-sunday-isn-t-about-convincing-people>, accessed 4/16/2019