

**All Saints Episcopal Church Steenrijk,
Chapel of the Resurrection**

Willemstad, Curacao

Third Sunday of Easter (A)

April 23, 2023

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

DRAFT

“Sharing”

The Holy Gospel according to

Luke 24:13-35

That very day, the first day of the week, two of the disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief

priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are,

and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. 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?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Keep us close to you, Dear Lord, that we may recognize you in our day-to-day lives. Amen.

A few years ago I attended an interdenominational church conference in the United States in which there was a discussion how different “church” is now versus what we see in the early chapters of The Acts of the Apostles. The first century church is described in Acts Chapter 2 where all their goods were held in common, and they sold them as necessary to care for anyone in need.

What's more, the first century congregations ate their meals in each other's homes. Can you imagine that happening in our day and age? Maybe for our close family, but surely not for our next door neighbors and members of our church, or would we? The two disciples on the Emmaus Road invited a perfect stranger into their home to share a meal, and, would you believe it, he turned out to be the Risen Lord. But they did not even recognize him until they broke bread together. The Bible says that sometimes we are offering

hospitality to angels even when we are not aware of it. Have you hosted an angel in your home recently? Maybe not, but our twenty-first century sensitivities keep us from practicing what some have called, “radical hospitality”. One church I worked in thirty years ago actually had meals in each other’s homes on Maundy Thursday, mimicking the Jewish seder; but that was only once a year. The sanctity of our homes is great. But in the First Century, sharing meals together was the common thing to do among

Christians—can we imagine that? They did not have church buildings then, only home meetings. Most physical church buildings began many decades later.

When I worked for a year or so at Trinity Episcopal Church in Southport, Connecticut, our hostess gave us a small apartment above a garage each Saturday night when I had to celebrate the 8 am Sunday Eucharist, and our kind hostess began serving us Sunday lunch every week. What a special thing that was. But it now seems that sharing meals between parishioners would be breaking

some sort of sacred rule of thumb somehow. One or two churches we have supplied at have a ‘Sunday Breakfast Club’ where those coming to the early service always eat breakfast together at a local deli. However, it seemed a bit of a club since they did not invite new people into their breakfast fellowship. And one church has an informal brunch group each Sunday for three or four people.

Table hospitality is a lost art, it seems. Few participate in such an ancient Christian practice. But maybe we need to reconsider our historic roots. Our

churches have often become rather sterile. But our spiritual family is actually those sitting around us in our pews. Have we ever considered that?

At the church where I served as the Rector for 24 years, we got the idea from a nearby Episcopal Hispanic mission to serve a simple meal at church each Sunday. The Vicar said his group would bring in the food and share it each Sunday, and they did. Well, we did not have Anglo people at our nearby church who would cook food regularly and bring it in, except for one or two, so we

set out to have a simple meal which often consisted of low-fat chicken hotdogs, rice, and a salad or vegetable. It sounds simple enough, but for about fifty dollars we could feed fifty people, and the program took off, beginning with eight people. By the time I retired we were feeding a hundred each Sunday, and now they are feeding a hundred fifty each Sunday. And since the Hispanic service is at 11:30 right before the meal, the Hispanic folk tend to bring in more varieties of food than did the Anglo folk.

And it is indeed a meal of a happy family; take that, McDonald's!

There is an old adage that the family which prays together and eats together, remains together. And indeed, that does seem to be the case in that church since the so-called 'feeding program' has been underway. Several other Episcopal churches now bring their youth groups and sometimes their Sunday Schools once a month to bring and serve the food, so that church now doesn't have to do much more than have rice and chicken hotdogs there to sort of 'bulk up

the food' if need be. Indeed, Christ is known in the breaking of the bread, and in the chicken hotdogs and rice.

Another of my pet peeves is how we sort of glibly say a part of the Eucharistic Prayer each Sunday: right after the priest blesses the bread, the priest says the words: "After supper he took the cup." "After supper he took the cup" – see the Book of Common Prayer Pages 335, 342, 363, 368, 371, and 374. When have you ever seen a "supper" preceding the taking of the cup of wine? Never, I suspect. Nor have I. But we say this

phrase every Sunday in every Episcopal church, and also in the Lutheran and Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, and probably in many other churches as well, I surmise. But none of us has that “supper” which we proclaim during the Holy Eucharist. We don’t have enough time, I am sure many will say. How on earth can we get home to a noonday meal if we have a supper between the bread and the wine? But why do we insist on using those words in the Eucharistic prayer each Sunday? The word, “supper” is in the model Eucharistic

prayers we have in 1 Corinthians 11:25 and Luke 22:20; and in Mark 14:22 and Matthew 26:26, the Last Supper is (quote) “During the meal” (unquote) when the bread is blessed and broken and the cup is taken. In the Gospel according to John, no Eucharistic formula is presented, but it is alluded to in John 6:53, which is generally interpreted as being a spiritual reflection on the Eucharist which had begun in the Last Supper, and this passage in John immediately follows the feeding of the five thousand with five small loaves of

barley bread and two fish, which was an actual miraculous meal that is described in all four Gospels.

So we possibly do not want to take the time to have a supper, except on rare occasions in a very few churches who have a seder-like meal on Maundy Thursday. It is as though we want to remember the Last Supper, but fain should we actually reenact it.

Yet many of our churches continue to decline. People stray from the fold because they are not fed either spiritually or physically, or should I suggest, both?

Can a blessed meal be better than a McDonald's knock-off? Don't we Christians say it is better to be blessed than to be happy?

One Christian speaker made the point that one sneaky way the devil attacks us is in taking away our joy. If the devil can divert us from joyful living, keeping us from living a full life joyfully, then he knows that invariably we will begin to fall away from our faith. If we let the devil steal our joy, then we are letting him steal our faith. Is that not what we see?

So how do we firm up our joy? I posit that breaking bread together, having real meals together, is at least a start. And then we can go on from there to serve our neighborhood, our community, and the world as best we can. But we need to have joy in our hearts to keep us motivated to encourage each other to cling securely to our faith.

At a food table at the Orlando, Florida, Airport a man from Michigan sat across from me and said that the church “had left him”, a church he had attended for over forty years. I asked

him to explain a little, but he only reiterated his claim that the church had left him. And now he said he worships on the golf course. I'm not sure what happens when it snows in that part of the country on a Sunday. But it seems to be a systemic observation that more and more just don't see the value to their lives added by coming to church each Sunday. Indeed, in my old church in Elizabeth, New Jersey, we observed that most of the parishioners came only once every three weeks, and their tithe also mirrored their attendance. A weekly

pledge meant to many that that is what they would give only on the Sunday they were in church.

It is a big challenge to move from a church that is shrinking to one that is helping to make parishioners disciples who will help disciple other people who will do the same for three more iterations. That is probably what it will take, to keep the Christian faith alive and growing in our time.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Amen.

Description:

A church that eats and prays together stays together. How much faith do we have in the Bible story of the Last Supper? Isn't it suggesting we have a Sunday meal together?

Tags:

Sunday, meal, Eucharist, Eucharistic, Orlando, Florida, plant, planting, pray, prays, eat, eats, Episcopal, church, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox,

churches, golf, Michigan, disciple,
disciples, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
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