

A Revelatory Meal

April 26, 2020

Luke 24:13-35

Growing up, an essential element for how I was raised was dinner as a family. Every evening, rain or shine, my mom or dad would make us all dinner, and with the nightly news on in the background, we would sit down at the table and talk about how our days went. Through eating together, we connected and joined together in the successes and failures that happened during each other's days. This type of connection is best exemplified by celebratory meals like Thanksgiving dinner, Christmas parties, wedding receptions, and birthday parties. In these moments, we are celebrating successes and new stages of life begun together as one unified group. With any luck, Katie and I will be able to keep this tradition strong once we start our family. However, this concept of the importance of a meal together is not new by any stretch of the imagination. For example, The Last Supper happened over 2,000 years ago and we're not only still talking about it, but we're replicating it, having turned it into one of our sacraments in worship, one of our central and most sacred practices. During Jesus' ministry, a number of his parables and other lessons happened around meals, the Feeding of the 5,000 being a prime example of such a meal. Today's reading, as it turns out, adds another meal to the already-extensive list of revelatory meals.

Today's reading is the famous passage of the Road to Emmaus. In it, we have Jesus travelling with two followers of Jesus, Cleopas and it's believed his wife, Mary. Along the way, he is easing their troubled hearts, explaining how Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is the climax, how everything from Creation to this point has been leading up to and pointing to this series of events. In his explanation, Jesus is not leaving out a single detail, going into great detail about every last little reference and movement towards this point in the biblical narrative. Note though that, at this point, Cleopas and Mary don't know who this stranger is. They still haven't recognized him as being the Risen Lord over whom their hearts are broken. Then, they get to Emmaus, they invite Jesus to stay with them, to eat with them, and he does. He eats with them, prays, breaks the bread, and it is in this moment that Cleopas and Mary realize that it is Jesus who has been walking and talking with them, who is now eating with them. Note then what has happened: it is not the teaching that is the revelatory experience for Cleopas and Mary. Rather, it's the *meal* that is the revelatory experience. Why this is significant to note is because what we actually have here is not just a common meal, but rather, a repeat, a replaying of two different meals that had previously happened where great revelations also occurred.

The first meal that is being recreated, and probably the most obvious, is the Last Supper. Mind you, Cleopas and Mary were not at the Last Supper. They are followers but not members of Jesus' 12 Disciples. So, a meal that Jesus had just a few days earlier, he is having again for their benefit. During the Last Supper, Jesus reveals who he is, why he must die. He reveals that Peter will deny him three times and that Judas will betray him. During this meal, though, just as Jesus took bread, blessed it, and broke it with the twelve, so too does Jesus do the same thing with Cleopas and Mary. While we don't know what Jesus prayed or said in the blessing and breaking of the bread, we see here a communion of sorts. It's possible that Jesus used what we call the "Words of Institution," said over the Communion bread and cup: "This is my body which is broken for you and for many." Perhaps this is what reveals his identity to the couple. Regardless of what was said though, we still find obvious references to the Last Supper in this

meal with Cleopas and Mary. As I said before, though, this is not the only meal that is being referenced and recreated with this meal.

The other revelatory meal, one that's not as obvious but that arguably holds greater theological significance to what is happening here is hinted at by the wording of what happens next. When Cleopas and Mary realize this man is Jesus, many translations write that "their eyes were opened," a phrase that was first used with Adam and Eve when they partook of the forbidden fruit. Eve takes a bite, then hands it to Adam who takes a bite. In that moment, their eyes are opened and they realize they are naked. In the story for today, Cleopas and Mary have their eyes opened, and they realize what is going on. They are no longer a part of the world of old, the world of chaos and Death. Now, they have entered into a new world, a new Creation, a new life where the powers of Sin and Death have been defeated. They have entered into a new Creation where salvation is by grace rather than one's actions. They are now continuing their journeys of life in a world where they have received redemption through the death and rising of the one who now breaks bread with them.

Why is this significant to understand, though? It's significant for a couple reasons. First and foremost, this is happening the day of the Resurrection, Easter Sunday, the day the Marys see Jesus at the tomb and are charged with sending the disciples to Galilee where they will meet him. A week from this day, Jesus will appear to all but Thomas, and then a week after *that*, Jesus will present himself to Thomas. This is but the first of many occurrences where Jesus reveals himself as the Risen Lord before he ascends to the right hand of God.

The other significant point is what this means for those who follow Jesus. As I mentioned for the Palm Sunday service, Jesus was being paraded around and celebrated because they thought he was going to be their Savior. They believed that, just as the Jews had their Exodus from slavery in Egypt, Jesus was going to lead them in a new exodus out from under Roman rule to renewed independence. However, when he's beaten, crucified, and killed, those hopes die in an instant. This Savior has faced Death and seemingly lost. However, here he yet stands alive after facing Death. Jesus has in so doing freed humanity from its enslavement to Death and Sin, freeing it once again to journey with him to the Promised Land. Therefore, this story of Emmaus is by no means a stand-alone story. This story is the beginning of a much longer journey in this new world. This is merely the first paragraph of what could be called the "*re-Creation Story*," and such knowledge that "what once was is not now," that's a *huge* revelation, one that needs sharing, which is exactly what Cleopas and Mary do. We are told they immediately set out to tell the disciples what they saw.

In short, every time we join together in a meal, whether it be Communion, some form of fellowship (e.g. a potluck), or even just gather for a dinner with our families, we are reminded of our unity as the children of God, sharing the love and support God gives us with one another. We are reminded of our having been brought through the waters of Baptism, no longer slaves to Sin and no longer needing to fear the tyranny of Death. I imagine that, once we are gathered together again, we will be having such a celebratory meal as this, celebrating as one body God's bringing us through this time and our entering into a world that, more than likely, will be different from what we once knew. So, in closing, I ask you all, what do you think that first meal together again will reveal to you?