

Title: All our Eyes Opened in the Breeding of Bread
Sermon on Communion on World Communion Sunday
October 6, 2019
Scriptures: Luke 24:13-35, 1 Corinthians 11:17-26

The common can be transformed into something amazing and profound.

(Bring in some sand and start playing with it gently)

Sand. It is fun to just play with sand in the middle of church. *Sand.* It is common. It is everywhere.

I grew up in Florida and Arizona, so I'm familiar with and. Everywhere. Sometimes so common, so simple. Sometimes annoying when it got in uncomfortable places. Sometimes blowing in your face. In Arizona, we had sandstorms, both small and large, that came from the heat creating turbulence in the wind.

Those living in Israel in Jewish times would be very familiar with sand. When I visited Israel almost a decade ago, I was right at home. *Sand*, so simple, and almost something one might not see as very important.

Sand is primarily made of the combination of silicon and oxygen. Two incredibly common elements.

And yet, today this material is elevated higher to an incredible level. Silicon and oxygen is the material used in almost all of our electronics. Just look at the electronics each of us has. This amazing computing that has evolved over the last 50 years is based in this common stuff. So many people investigating all of the marvels of this small piece of God's creation, this seemingly common, almost ignorable part of God's creation, and engineering it into all of the amazing computational devices around you. Devices that we use to communicate, that we use to stay together, that we use to help medically sustain life.

On a normal day, I'm carrying 3-4 of these technological miracles or maybe more. (show these items) I imagine many of you carry a few of them as well. And I personally would encourage one using electronics in service, where it helps you, as there are bibles in many languages, tools that are available, etc.

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Lets take another example. Bread. We have it everywhere. (Show a loaf of bread) In such an affluent age of human history, bread is common. Many people have no issue in just throwing it away if it is not just right. Those who know me know I hate wasting food, but we might agree that it is a common viewpoint. I love going to the grocery store in France, because you have a huge area of bread. One can just smell the fresh baked bread. And yet it is considered common, basic, cheap, and almost ignored. It is something enjoyed and necessary for life.

Throughout human history, bread has been important for life and has sustained life. Bread and simple fluids that were safe to drink were essential and common. Every culture. Every community. Every continent.

Many ancient cultures utilized bread at the start of their meal. And yet, in the breaking of bread, Jesus transformed the routine, the common, and made it deep with meaning. Greco-Roman dinners started with bread and drink. Jewish tradition started Friday evening Shabbat dinner, or what we know as Sabbath, with wine and bread. It still does today in many Jewish homes. One has a particular blessing for each of them:

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe who creates fruit of the vine (Amen)

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe who brings forth bread from the earth (Amen)

The blessings bring a time enjoying being together in a mood of celebration. The Jewish tradition of Passover raises the importance of bread and wine as elements in their escape from bondage, as part of their remembrance of their journey to freedom.

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And we see Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Certainly two of Jesus' disciples did.

In the 1 Corinthians passage, we heard the earliest written recording of the words of Jesus at his last supper which was a Passover meal. These are such simple, common, ordinary things. Bread and drink. Things one sees and uses every day raised to the level of remembrance of Jesus life, suffering, and resurrection. God has a way of taking the ordinary and routine and doing amazing things with them. If God can do that with such small things, what can God do with us? With our relationships, with our community? I expect all of us sometimes believe we are small, that we are insignificant, like mustard seeds and sparrows. And yet God is there wanting and longing to transform each of us, and all of us collectively. God knows the hairs on our head, who knows and loves everyone of us.

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Could you imagine being on the road with the two disciples? Individuals continuing on with their lives after the hard week, not sure how to process everything they experienced. I'm guessing some can relate to such weeks in their life, and some of you might be going through such a walk this week. Jesus met them where they were, walking with them through everything and clarifying what happened. Jesus meets us where we are, and walks with us as well. It is a powerful model for each of us to follow. And they invited Jesus to stay with them. Life together.

I wonder if these two disciples were observing Jesus in the upper room? It was typical in Greco-roman meals to have people outside of the inner circle as we see with the dinners with Jesus and the Pharisees. So maybe, or maybe it was Jesus' tradition that they remembered a previous dinner. Either way, in the breaking of bread, in the community of sharing his life together, their eyes were opened and their hearts burned within them.

And their eyes were opened at the breaking of the bread.

And the practice continued through the early church, as we see in Acts (2:46)¹ that they broke bread together often, including on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), also continuing the egalitarian meals Jesus had with his disciples. Communion was local, shared with family, and done whenever possible, in remembrance of Jesus. And new eyes continued to be opened.

And yet, even with the raising up of bread and wine, as humans we still manage to find ways to distort things. Did you hear the beginning of the 1 Corinthians passage? Factions were developing within the Corinthian congregation including around the breaking of bread. Richer members of the community showed up earlier, because they had the means to do so, and started eating, while the poorer members arrived later, and there might not be anything for them to eat. How is this community? Paul writes the entire letter encouraging unity in the church and eliminating factions within the church.

Paul understood that communion is about community, and about a point of unity in the community as a single egalitarian community. Everyone is equally welcome. No one is perfect, no one is better than any other, and no one is lesser than any other.

Historically, this pattern has repeated itself. It seems that unity of Christians would be the most natural thing we can do, and yet historically we have been divided into factions around this table. Issues arose over who has the right to preside, who has the right to come, who is in, and who is out. We create factions where God seeks unity and community. Just over two hundred years ago, our black sisters and brothers had to wait for all of the white individuals to have communion first. It led, understandably, to the first African denominations in America. The apostle Paul would be aghast with the table being used this way.

Thankfully as a church we no longer see these issues today. No? Humans have a hard time not creating hierarchical structures that are typical of all primates, and often it is just a question of

¹ Acts 2:46: "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts"

what gets created. And yet, in this space, we are called to equality, each of us equally cherished by our creator, theology contrary to most human experience.

Through communion, this Sunday we join the unity of Christians in every church. We have communion in unity with all of God's children on one day, and we remember that unity with others. And like those early travelers in Emmaus, once their eyes were opened, we move towards community with other believers.

I am personally in love with the Disciples view of Communion as a point of unity within the Christian community as an event we repeat as often as we able to repeat together. Certainly communion is special because we proclaim Jesus' life, suffering, and bodily resurrection. Communion is to be done in the very real common spaces of our lives, the very places God wishes to transform.

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This matters as I grew up United Methodist and have been United Methodist most of my life. My kids grew up United Methodist, and I am attempting ordination in the United Methodist Church. And yet, during my undergraduate days, I spent over two years in Campbell-Stone traditions which forever transformed my understanding on communion and that it is a point of radical unity among all denominations. It often makes me not a "good" Methodist according to accepted polity². And I am thankful that I have the opportunity to speak in a Disciples church to share my excitement and love of this meal that Jesus gave to us.

May our eyes be opened in the breaking of the bread, opened to Christ and opened to all of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And remember, everyone is invited.

² I likely expect Wesley might agree if he saw how things had evolved over the last couple of centuries. Wesley strongly believed in unity, as one sees in his sermon on "Catholic Spirit", with the lines "then give me your hand".

Praise be to God. Amen.

Gospel passages: (NRSV)

Luke 24:13-35: ¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ 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?” ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ 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. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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.” ²⁵ Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² 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?” ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” 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.

1 Corinthians 11:17-26: ¹⁷ Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹ Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. ²⁰ When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. ²¹ For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. ²² What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you! ²³ For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.