

How do we know people?

I know a lot of people – Barak Obama, Madonna, Willie Nelson, Carole King, Nick Saban – I know them – but I don't really know them. I couldn't introduce any one of them to you as my friend.

We are born into a family. Our parents, siblings, extended family – lots of people help us as we grow. I suspect it is natural to think that the people who know us best are those people who make up our family. They know us. They know what we will do and what we won't do – to an amazing degree of accuracy.

We know people by the family they come from. The teachers at school assumed that I would be the same student as my sisters before me. That family name is important and it sticks with us through our life. Sometimes people move to a new location to get a fresh start in life because they feel they cannot live down or up to the family history. One of the questions on the Peace Corps application asks if you are joining the Peace Corps to get a new start. Be careful how you answer that question. Truth is, you can move to a new location, but you carry with you all the good and bad that makes you, you. A new location will not change who you are and the way you deal with yourself and others. Putting yourself in a new location will not make a new you.

Friends are important to us. They help us know who we are. Many times friendships are based on common interest. We become friends because we share similar interest. Some of my best friends are ministers. We are friends because we have worked and shared together the task of ministry. The same is true of school teachers, writers, musicians. In the living and working together, we come to know people. True, that knowledge may be limited to our field of interest, and if that is the case, we are not really friends.

We are colleagues. My friends that are ministers are people I share much more with than the task of ministry. We share life - joys and sorrows, hope and fear, meaning and purpose.

I like our text in Luke today about the Emmaus journey. It speaks of how we know people.

The scene shifts from Peter, who had gone home amazed at what he had seen, to two others who were apparently returning home to Emmaus after having traveled to Jerusalem for Passover. As they talk, they are joined by Jesus. But everything so familiar many times blinds us. The two travelers did not recognize him. Jesus appears naïve in asking what things they were discussing. But it is soon clear that Jesus is the one with the answers. They journey to Emmaus. Once there, they try to persuade Jesus to stay with them, to share a meal with them. It is in the breaking of the bread that they recognize who Jesus is. How do they recognize Jesus? Many times recognition is based on visible signs, memory, or reasoning, but the best kind of recognition is "that which arises from action alone." We are told that Jesus blesses the bread. It is in this sharing of bread that he is known.

Today, we share in this symbolic understanding of Christ among us as we share together communion. Many times, we like these two on the road to Emmaus think we have all the answers. We, like them are blinded by the familiar. Luke introduces the language we use at communion here in this story. "Jesus takes bread, Jesus blesses the bread, Jesus breaks the bread. It is in this breaking of bread that they recognize Jesus. And it is at this moment that Jesus disappears from their sight. If we are honest, we know that God's presence is always elusive, dancing at the edge of our awareness and perception. It is like the words in the story the nuns sing in "THE SOUND OF MUSIC.," "How can you catch a moon beam in your hand, how do you hold a wave upon the sand?" The act of communion is to remind us that in all our familiarity with the Jesus story, we can lose sight to the holiness, the very presence of God among us.

One important thing that this text does for us is to put communion in a context apart from "The Last Supper." The popular mind still tends to think of communion as only connected to the last supper before the arrest, trial and death of Jesus. Communion only thought of in this way makes it a somber, sad activity. Our text for today reminds us that here, in the midst of Easter, that the Lord's Supper is also a resurrection meal. The presence of God in our lives is not just about death, it is also about life. Jesus is known to the two travelers in the breaking of bread. Easter is not over at sundown on Easter Sunday. That just may be the best good news in our text for today. Easter calls us to life.

PILGRIM C H U R C H

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One other important aspect about this Emmaus story for today is that it reminds us that the experience of God is not a private gift. It is never for us alone. The discovery of the identity of the fellow traveler caused the travelers from Emmaus to return to Jerusalem to declare that they had seen the Lord. Now, I will admit, that these words may seem an idle tale to others, but to those who have witnessed God's transcendent presence in their lives at a tomb, or on a lonely road, or in the hospitality extended to a fellow traveler, or in a nursing home, or in the lives of children, or in the acceptance in friendship, the words become a transforming reality.

Yes, I know that the breaking of bread is a common experience to all of us. I believe it is in the common arena of life that the presence of God is made known to us – and through us. I invite you to be known in the presence of God and in the presence of this community of faith as we share this breaking of bread together today.