

Sermon, St. David's Episcopal Church, 4/30/17, Easter 3C, Luke 24:13-35 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

We sing that at the later two services after I break the bread. That piece of music is called a "fraction anthem," because it's sung after the "fraction," or breaking, of the bread.

I noticed when I first came to St. David's that same fraction anthem was used all the time, even Lent, when we don't say Alleluia in worship. In Lent back then, "Jesus" was sung in place of the "Alleluia," but Bonnie says that for the first few Sundays of Lent it would sound like "Al-Jesus."

I began serving at St. David's in February six years ago. Sometime around October, I asked Bonnie when we would change the fraction anthem. She told me that the same one had been used for about 12 years. I suggested a seasonal rotation. I can't remember if we first did it during Advent or Lent; but, *oh my*. This was a change right up there with starting the 9 AM service at 9: that is, *not popular*. At the 11:15, some asked when we were going back to the "traditional" fraction anthem. I pointed out that using the same one for 12 years didn't make that one THE traditional fraction anthem; and that, in fact, there are other fraction anthems in our traditional hymnal, and that I chose the "new" anthems from there.

Most of you are VERY attached to the one we're using now. The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread. I've heard stories from parents with very young children about their kids singing this anthem at home, which makes me inclined to use it more than I would at any other church (although your sulking when I expose you to other sacred music still annoys me).

This anthem is especially appropriate today, with our Gospel from Luke, which we refer to as the road to Emmaus, even though the most important part happens after arrival.

Cleopas and his friend are grieving on the road. We heard "They stood still, looking sad." I told you on Easter Sunday that grief is an important emotion, one we should allow ourselves to feel and express. So what's wrong with standing still and looking sad?

Cleopas and his friend are stuck on Good Friday. They are still mourning Jesus on Easter. They have heard from the women that Christ is risen, and they claim to have been astounded; but they don't believe the story yet.

They do seem to feel a little better as this stranger interprets the scriptures for them, and they invite him in for the night.

And these disciples then knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread. As we sing most weeks of the year as our fraction anthem.

But it's not only the breaking. This story helps us see the major actions of the Eucharist: he *took* bread, *blessed* and *broke* it, and *gave* it to them.

Take, bless, break, give.

We do this every Sunday. Bill or I take the bread that is brought up to us. I bless it, using various prayers. We break it. There's one dramatic big breaking, the official fraction, in silence; and then we try to break it up into as many pieces as we can during the fraction anthem. Then, we give it to you.

The Eucharist is the central act of our worship. Take, bless, break, give.

I know that the Eucharist is very important to most of you. When some say "I don't need to go to church on Sundays; I can just go look at a sunset," the Eucharist is what I think of first. We encounter Christ in this mysterious act in a way that we do not by looking at a sunset.

I asked David Love recently about a certain sermon, and he responded that the Eucharist is meaningful regardless of the homily. I was struck by that. Or I think of our own Dr. Mac Todd, whom I can talk about because he's not here today due to a Cursillo weekend. Mac often advocates for smaller services that don't get much turnout, and sometimes we butt heads about this a bit on the worship commission. But I know that Mac is driven by a burning desire for the Eucharist, and that always helps me to understand where he's coming from when he advocates for a service that requires me to write a sermon for 11 people on a Friday night.

When I first pursued the priesthood, I wasn't driven by a burning desire to celebrate the Eucharist. I was all about the Bible, the word. I was in a weekly Bible study back in 2000, and one member of our study became gravely ill. Eventually it was determined that he had Lou Gehrig's disease. He spent his last weeks at home, in a hospital bed in the living room, on a ventilator, being fed from a tube in his stomach.

He was the reason I became a Eucharistic visitor. These are the people you see coming up here about once a month to take communion to our friends at Heritage Oaks. Eucharistic visitors can also take communion to other people unable to make it to church, and as our congregation ages, I hope more of you will consider this ministry.

I became a Eucharistic visitor and while training, went with my priest to take communion to this man. We'd had to work it out with his doctors. He couldn't take the wafers, because he couldn't eat by mouth. He was fed out of a tube in his stomach, and had a ventilator at his throat. His doctor said we could dip a small spoon in the wine and set it in his mouth. So that's what the priest did the first time, while I watched and learned.

A week later, it was my turn. I'd been to see this man while he was sick. It made me nervous, because his life had changed so much. He used to love to drink Black Dog wine, but now he couldn't eat or drink. He was a NASCAR fan, and I was no help to him there; but when I visited, I read him psalms or caught him up on gossip from Bible study, and he indicated that even though I couldn't bring him Black Dog wine or talk about NASCAR, he liked me coming around. He couldn't talk, but would write a few words.

The communion visit was different. I was participating in this sacred four-fold ritual of take, bless, break, give. I was getting to do the "give" part for the first time, and I will never forget dipping the spoon in the wine and putting it in his mouth. He closed his eyes and sucked on that

spoon with such longing, such reverence, that I was instantly, deeply ashamed of every Sunday in my life that I had been able to receive communion but had not.

That turned out to be his last communion. The first time I served as a chalice was at his funeral.

I was drawn to seminary by a love for Scripture and a belief that I was called to preach, but I remember the first time we had to practice celebrating the Eucharist. I hadn't put a whole lot of thought into it, other than wanting to pick up the right things at the right time. But while practicing in my small group, I was overcome with those four-fold actions of take, bless, break, give. Before I got to the break and give part, I forgot the Lord's prayer. The prayer I'd learned when I was four or five years old. I completely forgot it, because I was so overwhelmed by what I was doing. And more than a thousand celebrations of the Eucharist since, I am still overwhelmed and grateful every time I get to preside.

Those of you who were here when I was installed as rector six years ago may remember that my sister Wendy her son came for the occasion. I've told you before that I was up for a rector position in Arizona the same time I was in search here, and I withdrew from that Arizona church. Wendy, who lives in Arizona, cried when that happened.

But she said after that installation service, "my favorite part was watching you give them the bread. I loved watching your face. You love them already. I feel better now about you not being in Arizona."

By the way, Wendy's a chalice now at her church, and last Sunday I got to receive the chalice from her for the first time. It was breathtaking.

Take, bless, break, give. May we all know the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread today.