

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.

TAKE, BLESS, BREAK, GIVE

Now I have to ask you who have grown up in the church: do you remember your first communion?

Did any of you think as you went returned to your seat after receiving the bread and the cup, “Is this it?” I grew up in the Lutheran church where REAL WINE was used during communion, so some of my classmates were excited about that, but I was living on a small farm where there was a grape arbor and a wine cellar, and my parents had let us sample wine. But I still hoped there would be something magical about the bread or the wine. Nonetheless, first communion didn’t seem to mean much to me or the members of my confirmation class.

No the communion meal was no big deal; it was hardly a meal at all; there are no vegetables, no protein, and no dessert (and we know how important dessert is!). And nothing spectacular occurred for me

when I took communion; no choir of angels, no light from heaven. It was just a dry piece of bread and a sip of wine.

And now I stand here as a pastor of a church with not a few children, where communion is open to everybody, and I wonder, particularly for those who are preparing for confirmation, whether communion means anything to them, and will it take on new meaning after their confirmation? Or will it be, as it was for me, a piece of dry bread and a sip of grape juice?

The challenge in making Holy Communion meaningful to a person, be it adult or child, is indicated by the name that we give this ceremony: HOLY COMMUNION. It's not HOLY-PIECE-OF-BREAD-AND-SIP-OF-GRape-JUICE. It's not even HOLY MEAL. It's Holy COMMUNION. Communion means "coming together" as we do over a dinner table, or as we *should* do over a dinner table. It's coming together with Jesus, and it's coming together with one another.

Let me jump into the Gospel message for a moment to talk about Christ's presence. Luke writes about these two disciples going from Jerusalem to Emmaus, which was about seven miles, long enough to have a pretty thorough discussion about Moses and the prophets (I could teach my confirmation students quite a bit on a seven mile walk). And the thing that's so strange in this passage is that these disciples, who must have seen Jesus at some point, don't recognize that it is Jesus walking with them along the road and explaining things to them. It's only when Jesus TAKES the bread, BLESSES it, BREAKS it, and GIVES it to the disciples that "their eyes were opened" and they recognized that it was Christ's presence that was with them. Today I want to teach you how to apply those four actions – TAKING, BLESSING, BREAKING, and GIVING – not only to the way you receive Holy Communion, but also to apply those actions at home, or at a restaurant, or wherever you come together for a meal around a table, be it public or private. I want to teach you how to do these things in remembrance of Jesus and of his presence which is always with you but should be recognized most when you share a common meal, *any* common meal. You can apply this at McDonalds or Wendy's. You can apply it at your school cafeteria. Most importantly you can apply it at home with your family around a dinner table.

First comes TAKE. "Jesus TOOK bread." Did you know that it's alright to *take*? Some people feel that it's a sin to "take" a vacation, or to "take" a break, or even "take" a drink of water or a meal. Our bodies are consumption machines; we can't survive without taking oxygen, food, water, shelter. God created this world with enough resources that we could take and never run out. That's the beauty of a functioning ecosystem; it's a perfect balance of giving and taking, each participant doing some of each. Not only that, but we need to take in a spiritual sense as well; it's essential in any loving relationship that a person gives love as well as takes love. If one partner insists on doing all the giving and never takes, it actually DEPRIVES the other person of doing what they feel a need to do, that is, to give. *Isn't that great?!* Don't you feel good about receiving what your partner *gives* you? Think about a marriage proposal; a guy saves money to buy an engagement ring for the one he loves. If she accepts the gift they are both ecstatic; if she declines the gift, it's probably going to be a short date that ends on a pretty somber note. A person who takes something brings joy to the one who gives. God rejoices when we TAKE what he gives us. And so Jesus has no qualms about TAKING bread.

But notice the next thing that he does; Jesus BLESSES the bread. Another way of putting it, Jesus *gave thanks*. I know this sounds so simple, but it's something we so often neglect. How often do we take a meal at school or at a restaurant or even at our own home and NEGLECT to give thanks to God? My friends, this is an essential discipline required for you to grow spiritually. Failing to thank God means failing to acknowledge God's gifts to you, and ingratitude leads to grumbling, to complaints, to a lack of

joy. Thanksgiving is a component of love – it's recognizing the goodness of others. Jesus recognizes God's love and so offers thanks for the gift before him.

Giving thanks regularly helps us by making us identify all that God gives us. Get into the practice of giving God thanks for all things – “thank you, God, that I woke up this morning. Thank you, God, for the pain in my back, because it reminds me that I'm alive. Thank you, God, for coffee that's waiting for me downstairs. Thank you, God, for the pajamas I'm wearing and the selection of clothes that I have hanging in my closet...” When you stop to really think about it, there is a LOT to thank God for. You know Jesus goes through the same four steps when he feeds the 5,000? He TAKES, BLESSES, BREAKS, AND GIVES. Imagine how some people must have smirked when he holds a loaf of bread up and gives thanks to God for it. “How in the world does he think that he's going to feed all of us with those five loaves and two fishes?” *IF YOU TAKE THE TIME TO RECOGNIZE ALL THAT GOD BLESSES US WITH, YOU BEGIN TO GROW IN FAITH FOR WHAT GOD IS CAPABLE OF DOING.* Can God feed 5,000 people on five loaves and two fish? SURE HE CAN! He can do it with one hand behind his back! Giving thanks gives us grateful hearts and faith in God.

Third, Jesus BREAKS the bread. And here is where we turn our focus to Jesus. At the Last Supper, he breaks the bread and says, “This is my body, given for you.” We talked about TAKING what offers us. We talked about BLESSING, about THANKING God for what he gives us. Now we look closely at the greatest gift he could ever give, which is Jesus, the perfect embodiment of God's love, and the perfect expression of God's love. How do you know someone loves you? Look at how much they give for you. What is the most anyone can give you? Their LIFE. Jesus tells us, “This is my body, BROKEN for YOU...This is my blood, SHED for YOU.” There is no greater love than this. The same God who created this world and all the wonderful foods in it, who gave us these wonderful bodies that can enjoy dancing and swimming and eating, well he also gave us his own life for our sin, so that we may no longer live in sin, that we may be assured of eternal life, so that our joy will indeed be complete.

Finally, Jesus GIVES the bread. He GIVES the cup. This brings us back around to that word COMMUNION. We are all together in this world, whether we're Christian or Jewish or Atheist or Agnostic, whether we're Puerto Rican or Costa Rican or Korean or Caucasian or African American...or Lesbian or Homophobic. And Jesus does not want anyone excluded from his table. And so we GIVE to others not based upon their ethnicity or their sexual orientation or their political convictions. We give to others based upon the fact that we are all God's children. Jesus did not instruct the disciples to go out before feeding the 5,000 and determine who agrees with him or who the foreigners are or who has enough money to buy their own dinner. He GAVE without drawing distinctions. Likewise, we must give without distinction. We give actual bread to those who physically hunger, and we give spiritual bread to those who spiritually hunger. There is plenty of each to go around, and that is God's will, that none should go hungry. We GIVE bread and water and actual food to the rich and the poor, the innocent and the guilty, the sick and the healthy, and we give the good news of God's amazing love to the rich and poor, the innocent and the guilty, the sick and the healthy as well. Remember that it was JUDAS who sat next to Jesus at the Last Supper, who dipped his bread into Jesus' cup. Jesus doesn't discriminate; neither should we.

So remember: TAKE, BLESS, BREAK, and GIVE. TAKE what God offers you out of his generous love, THANK him for his lavish giving, particularly thank him for Jesus, whose body was BROKEN, whose blood was spilled on the cross. Finally GIVE to all. The vision that Jesus offers us is one of glorious COMMUNION in this world, as peace and justice are the order of the day. God created a world that can sustain us all if we put our hearts and minds into a mindset of SHARING what we have with all.