

## “broken and shared, a living sign”

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Third Sunday of Easter, Festival of the Christian Home – May 8, 2011

Luke 24:13-35

### Family blanket

This is my family blanket. It is an off-white sampler afghan composed of twenty squares, each one with a unique cable pattern. Ten of the squares were chosen by my most intimate circle of support: my parents and brother, my three grandparents who were alive during my lifetime, our three closest family friends. My mother knit the blanket under the guise of making it for my parents’ 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and then gave it to me when I moved away from home when I graduated from high school. The feeling of being wrapped in the love of my family has been a comfort to me in the most difficult times. This blanket represents home for me.

### Festival of the Christian Home

Home and family can be hard things to talk about because they are at the very core of who we are, and we deeply emotionally invested. Just to acknowledge it upfront: this was a difficult reflection for me to write given the turmoil and transition at present in my own family as a result of my mother’s illness and hospitalization.

And yet, this morning we celebrate the festival of the Christian home. It’s okay.....I rolled my eyes the first time I heard that too. But it’s grown on me. I see it as a way of recognizing the importance of the “circles of nurture” we sang about earlier: “the intimate networks on whom we depend/of parent and partner and roommate and friend,”<sup>1</sup> and children, and teacher, and colleague and coach, and so many others.

Calling today Festival of the Christian Home instead of Mother’s Day is a way of celebrating the variety of places we find home. However, it does beg the loaded question: What is a *Christian* home? This is where the resurrection story we heard this morning can help us out.

### Encountering Jesus on the road to Emmaus

Two of Jesus’ friends, of Jesus’ intimate network, are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. These are guys who sacrificed everything to be part of Jesus’ community—their jobs, their families, their financial security—and it has all come crashing down around them. Their leader is dead. His followers are in hiding. And a strange story is being told by a bunch of women claiming he is actually alive. There is a lot for them to talk about as they walk: Is it true or is it over? What does the future look like? What should we do now?

Caught up in conversation, they barely notice the stranger who joins them until he speaks, “What’s all this you’re talking about?” “You don’t know?!” they respond, shocked and saddened, and they explain the events of the past three days. Suddenly seeming to know a bit more, the stranger dismisses their confusion as foolish and goes on to set everything that has happened in the past seventy two hours in context of thousands of years of the story of Israel, a story the disciples consider their own. It is as if, when discussing the recent election with a friend at Bridgehead, you are interrupted by a stranger who, somehow completely unaware an election has taken place, asks what you are talking about. After you fill her in, she then proceeds to explain the whole thing in light of ancient Greek Democracy, the Magna

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<sup>1</sup> Tomas Troeger. “God made from one blood all the families of earth.” *Borrowed Light: Hymn Texts, Prayers and Poems*. Oxford University Press, 1994.

Carta, and Canadian political history—and instead of being easily dismissed as conspiracy theory or wishful thinking, her explanation actually ignites your imagination and understanding!

When the triad arrives in Emmaus, Jesus' friends invite the stranger to stay with them. When they sit down for dinner the stranger takes the bread, blesses it, and breaks it. In that instant the disciples recognize the stranger is Jesus. And he disappears.

The friends get up, walk the seven miles back to Jerusalem, and tell their friends about the encounter on the road: their burning hearts, the broken bread, their renewed hope.

Four moments: a meeting, a conversation, a meal, a sending. Four moments that make an encounter with Jesus.

### **Encountering Jesus at church**

The encounter between Jesus and his friends on the road to Emmaus is often considered the basis for what we are doing right now. It is one starting point for understanding and structuring Christian worship. The Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary worship faculty write:

The presence and power of the risen Christ is revealed in the ordinary, daily action of gathering at a table to break bread and share a meal. As the disciples' physical hunger is satisfied, they become more deeply aware of the hunger of their souls. Then, as Christ blesses and breaks bread, their eyes are opened. They are able to receive spiritual nourishment—communion with Christ. Renewed and empowered by the meeting, they become witnesses to God's grace and power in the world.

In the same way, when Christians gather regularly at the table of worship, we are formed in our faith; we are transformed by communion with Christ and with one another; and we are energized by the power of the Spirit to do God's will. Worship becomes our central source of nourishment, the activating energy that makes it possible to live and move as Christ's body in our daily life in the world."<sup>2</sup>

This is what we hope for this morning in worship. *We gather*. For an hour or so our often separate journeys intersect. *We talk*. We tell one another our stories. We tell the story of Jesus: his death and his life. We tell the stories of scripture: "beginning with Moses and the prophets." We tell the stories of the church through the ages and the church today. We tell our own stories of encounter with God in Christ. *We eat*. Occasionally we share bread in communion. Every week we share the daily bread of our lives: our joys and concerns and the joys and concerns of our wider communities. *We go*. We are sent to share the peace and grace we may have received and to invite others into a community of storytelling and support we may have experienced.

We hope to encounter Christ in one another on Sunday morning, but the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus can also inspire our broader life as a family of faith. We meet one another many times during the week: in small groups, in our homes, in meetings. We share the stories of our community in Sunday School and Bible Study and Book Club. We eat potluck meals and chilli lunches and snacks. We are sent to share our faith in words and actions through relationships and service. We hope encounter with Christ is not limited to or even primarily centered on Sunday morning, but instead pervades the entire life of our family of faith: the body of Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> Marlene Kropf, Rebecca Slough, June Alliman Yoder. *Preparing Sunday Dinner*. Herald Press, 2005. 23.

## **Encountering Jesus at home**

However, we know that gathering for one hour a week, or even a few hours a week, as a church family of faith is not enough to form and transform us. Research overwhelmingly identifies the home as the most important place of faith formation. Our Protestant ancestors viewed families as the primary congregations of their lives. John Calvin believed families made monasteries unnecessary since Christian formation took place in the “religious community” of the home. Jonathan Edwards considered the Christian family to be “a little church.” John Wesley emphasized the importance of the home as a place of religious education.<sup>3</sup> We live out this fourfold encounter with Christ in our homes, our “little churches,” as well as in this big church.

### ***Gather***

Home starts with a meeting. This meeting may be the first cry of an infant or when adoptive parents look into the eyes of their son or daughter for the first time. It may be the initial spark of a lifelong partnership, like the marriage celebrated here yesterday. It may be a random roommate assignment that blossoms into a supportive friendship, or a group of friends sharing a house, or the choice of a single person to invite others into their life while still knowing the true joy of solitude and returning to a house that is exactly as it was left. Home may be found on the ski hill or in the alto section or on the soccer field. It may also be that loneliness or homelessness is the dominant experience for a time. Our homes change over the course of our lives. There are many types of intimate networks, of circles of nurture, in which we may encounter the transforming renewal of Christ. What circles of nurture have been home for you at different times in your life? Who is your home at present?

### ***Talk***

One way of exploring this question may be to ask: Who tells you the stories that remind you who you are? The one about your first day of school, or your terrible haircut, or your grandfather who was a conscious objector, or that hilariously disastrous vacation, or that difficult move to another province? Whose stories do you find yourself telling? I find the people who feature most prominently in my stories are often my home. We may at times explicitly tell the stories of our faith family in our other families, through bed time Bible reading, saying grace at meals, asking questions in the car, and living our faith and doubt with authenticity. Perhaps more often the stories of our faith community are implied in the tenderness and compassion with which we tell our stories and attend to the stories of others. We do not always recognize power of these exchanges immediately: it is only in retrospect that the disciples realize their hearts were burning while they were talking on the road. However, looking back, we can remember significant exchanges, the conversations that ignite our hearts and renew our faith, love and hope.

### ***Eat***

In our homes we share much more than stories. We share bread: the ordinary, mundane details of life. Eating together day in and day out brings an intimacy different than conversation. I recall what I have learned from the eating habits of the dozen roommates with whom I have shared apartments over the past eight years. I am pleasantly reminded of roommates past every time I make tortati (a cross between panzerotti and quesadillas), or add lentils to my pasta sauce, or use a brush to pre-wash my dishes. I was at a wedding a few years ago when a couple who wrote their own vows promised to: “dry when you wash, and wash when you dry.” It is in sharing these details of home, this bread of life, that we come to know the risen Christ.

In addition to being blessed the bread in the story is also broken. How well we know that our homes are so often broken. We mistreat and mistrust one another. We exclude and oppress each other. On the service trip to Philadelphia

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<sup>3</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster. *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*. Upper Room, 2005. 77-78.

we visited Love Park where the famous Love statue with the tilted O resides. The O is out of alignment with the L, V and E because love is imperfect. We may learn this lesson best in our homes. Yet we can hope that amidst the brokenness there will be moments when we recognize Christ among us. These moments may at times feel fleeting. The second his friends recognize him, Jesus disappears. However we can hope that they are enough for the transforming renewal of Christ to take root in our lives, to sustain us and send us out.

### **Go**

The disciples encounter with Jesus in the breaking of the bread propels the outward. They cannot remain in Emmaus but hit the road again to tell their story, to share their experience. The moments of grace we experience in our homes can propel us outward. They can invite us to tell our stories, to share our experiences, to widen our circles of nurture and intimate networks, to make a place at our table for strangers we meet on the road.

### **What is a Christian home?**

So....what is a Christian home? A Christian home is a relationship in which we meet another, share our stories, and our lives, and make space for others. A Christian home is a place, or a person, or a community in whom we encounter a living sign of the risen Christ.

On this day when we celebrate the Festival of the Christian Home and the Third Sunday of Easter, I celebrate the home I have received from the people represented in this blanket. I remember times when we met, talked, ate and parted ways. I remember burning hearts and broken bread. I wrap myself in their love and in them find a living sign of the risen Christ.