

**Second Sunday after Easter
8 May 2011**

Isaiah 51:1-6
Psalm 34:1-10
Acts 2:14a, 36-41
Luke 24:13-35

Significant input to this sermon came from an emailed sermon by Andy Kruger for the same day, at the GTN Cathedral.

In these weeks immediately after Easter, the Lectionary with its systematic plan for the reading of the Scriptures sets out several of Jesus' post-Resurrection appearances and words.

And today the Lectionary provides two readings from the same author; from the Gospel according to Luke and from Luke's book generally entitled "The Acts of the Apostles". These two volumes were intended as one book by their author – Luke the doctor.

Interestingly, the Lectionary for today ends the reading from Acts at Ch.2 v.41, instead of after the well-known v.42 which reads: "They [the early Christians] spent their time in learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and the sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers." [That's for next week.]

"The prayers" refer to the Jewish liturgy in the Temple and would have included prayers, the reading of scripture and teaching. The "fellowship meals" commonly happened in the evenings and included providing food for the poor.

By the time Luke is writing his book, "The prayers" and "the fellowship meals" have been combined. The liturgy of the word remained largely unchanged, while the meal ultimately became what we call the sacrament of Holy Communion.

The ritualized meal no longer 'fed' the hungry and so the development of the offertory occurred.

Let us now turn our attention to the Emmaus narrative, which artistically illustrates this pattern of worship; the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the sacrament.

The Liturgy of the Word – i.e. the Scriptures and the teaching or sermon – takes place on the road between Jerusalem and Emmaus. Luke tells us that this is a seven mile trip; If we presume it takes an hour and a half, then even if Jesus joined them half an hour into the journey... it's still a sermon of about an hour!

[If I was going to follow Jesus' example of preaching, I would still have about 50 minutes to go, but fortunately for you, in this case, I am a poor reflection of Christ.☺]

Luke constructs what he wants to tell us in a wonderful way: “Then, starting from Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] explained to them in the whole of scripture, the things that referred to himself.” Note the very clear purpose of the scriptures here: To reveal Christ to us. This collection of books are utterly worthless, and it’s words lifeless, unless they are read with ‘Christ tinted’ eyes. The Bible is not the truth; Christ is the Truth, and the various texts point us to the Truth!

We pick up the story again as the two disciples, and Christ who is yet to be revealed to them for who he is, enter Emmaus: “Then, when [Jesus] sat down with them at table, he took bread and said the blessing; he broke the bread, and offered it to them. Then [the disciple’s eyes] were opened and they recognized him; but he vanished from their sight.”

After this the two disciples rush back to Jerusalem to tell the Apostles that Jesus was “made known to them in the breaking of the bread.” This second part of the narrative is a wonderful illustration of the mystery of the Eucharist; the liturgy of the Sacrament.

Eucharistic theology has been a source of argument in the church over the centuries. Some say that when we are given the bread and wine, we literally receive Christ, while others have argued that the meal is merely a memorial and nothing more.

Thankfully, the Anglican Church broadly has avoided an overly-doctrinal focus, recognising that Christians of equal zeal and passion and devotion to Christ have had different views of the same sacrament.

Thomas Aquinas, a famous 13C scholar (1225-1274), gave a philosophical explanation of literally receiving Christ’s body and blood that has been used in various forms for centuries. It is easiest to describe this with an example:

Consider there are three chairs in front of me; one made of plastic, one of wood and one of metal. One could argue that the material from which a chair is made is ‘accidental’ to its substance. In other words a chair remains a chair, no matter what material it is made of.

In the same way, Aquinas argued that the substance of the bread is transformed into the body of Christ whilst it is still perceived by our senses as a wafer of bread. This view offers us the opportunity to literally encounter Christ at the table.

Probably the most well-known theologian who proposed the memorial view of Holy Communion is Huldrych Zwingli, a Swiss Reformer. His theology leans heavily on the words used by Jesus at the Last Supper (as also told to us by Paul in his Letter to the Corinthians), and Zwingli put great emphasis on the act of remembering.

However, the memorial view offers no chance for the person receiving communion to literally encounter Christ. Rather, this view places us between the Ascension and the Second Coming of Christ... a time characterized by the real absence of Jesus.

Our text in the Gospel marvellously holds these two contradictory views in tension. In one moment Jesus is there, expounding scripture, breaking bread, and in the next moment... he has disappeared. The disciples are left alone... what do they do? They run to share the Good News with the others.

As we come forward to receive the Body and Blood of Christ this morning, I hope that we will encounter the real presence of Christ and experience the physical absence of Christ at the same time.

As we come to kneel at the altar and hear those familiar words: “the Body of Christ”, “the Blood of Christ”, may we hear two meanings in those words:

May the bread become for us the Body of Christ; may Christ literally dwell within us!

Moreover, may we recognize that **we** are indeed the body of Christ. He is not physically present with us, at least not in the way he was when he walked down the road to Emmaus with the two disciples. We live in anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ... we are to be his body to everyone we come across and share our lives with, including the poor, the fatherless, the widow, the rape victim, homeless person... and more!

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**Conclusion:**

**Excerpts from An Anglican Prayer Book page 101 on The Eucharist**

*With encouragement to everyone to later read the whole page*

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