

**Broken**  
**May 8, 2011**  
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Have you ever heard the expression “geographical cures?” It is possible that I made it up, so it might not be a fair question. But chances are, even if you don’t know the expression, you know people who have tried them before. Or maybe been such a person yourself once in awhile. Or, at the very least, you have most likely heard stories about them.

The general scenario of a geographical cure goes something like this: someone is involved in a situation that becomes unbearable. It might be a job that’s falling apart on them. Or it might be the sudden loss of a friend or family member. Or—and I think this may be the most frequent motivation for a geographical cure nowadays—a relationship falls apart, and a person ends up feeling like there is nothing left for them where they are. In some fundamental way the person ends up feeling kind of broken...or maybe *very* broken. I think we have all been there at one time or another, whether or not we take the next step.

The next step; the cure; is a geographical cure. There are a bunch of expressions for how to do this sort of cure: you might “get the heck out of Dodge,” or “hit the road,” or “head into the sunset.” But the point is you move yourself somewhere else. It could be somewhere that you have never been; rich in possibilities and the glamour of the new and undiscovered. It might be somewhere really familiar where one might seek well known comforts. Or it might be a move down the block; or any number of little changes in between. But surely the new location would be the place where one’s brokenness could mend. Surely the cure for our pain would be geographical.

I think that the two disciples in this morning’s reading were seeking a geographical cure. It was late in the day on the first Easter Sunday. The Sabbath had passed, so it was okay to go for a long walk—which is exactly what Cleopas and his unnamed companion were doing. Yet the Passover celebration *was not* over. Presumably Cleopas and his companion had gone into Jerusalem for the eight day festival of Passover. But they left early by any calculation. Now, there *might* be some outside chance that they needed something from Emmaus and were just out on an errand. But what could Emmaus possibly have that the Holy City of Jerusalem would not during the height of the most important festival of the year? I think they were hitting the road, heading into the sunset and getting the heck out of Jerusalem.

After all, the text indicates that they were unclear where things stood with Jesus and this whole discipleship thing. They had clearly heard the stories about his resurrection. But they still left Jerusalem. They heard the story of the women finding the empty tomb. Yet, they still left

Jerusalem. They were even able to describe in detail to the incognito Jesus all about how the male disciples returned to the tomb to check out the women's report. But they still left Jerusalem. Why? In addition to all the details they knew about the resurrection, they also divulged this about Jesus: "we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."<sup>1</sup> In other words, the hope of Jesus being the Messiah was somehow broken for them. So they got the heck out of town.

They decided to try a geographical cure for their broken hopes. It is not an unforgivable impulse. People do it all the time, and I expect we probably always have. There is only one problem with geographical cures: they simply don't work. There is a quote which is often attributed to Yogi Berra, that speaks to why: "Wherever you go, there you are..." our problems travel with us...we can't outrun our struggles. Which is why, even though they express broken hopes about Jesus being the Messiah, the Disciples can't stop talking about these strange and confounding stories about his resurrection. They are turning it all over as the story opens, it becomes their passionate topic when Jesus joins them and "their eyes were kept from recognizing him,"<sup>2</sup> the topic of resurrection pervades this morning's story from beginning to end.

A funny thing about the resurrected Jesus is that he is often *not* recognized at first. Mary had trouble telling him from the gardener, the collected disciples don't recognize him when he appears to them on the beach, and so on. In this morning's reading this lack of recognition allows Jesus to hear the disciples explain their own understanding of the resurrection. And then he gets to correct them...at length. He spends the rest of the walk unpacking all of Jewish Scripture to explain his own crucifixion and resurrection. But they still don't see him for who he is. Their hopes remain broken. Yet they are oddly attached to this scripturally savvy stranger. Toward evening as they near Emmaus, Jesus "walked ahead as if he were going on."<sup>3</sup> But the disciples insisted that he join them at their table.

Fortunately for them and us, their invitation was accepted. Then it happened. "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them."<sup>4</sup> Does that sound familiar? He took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them...what sort of Table were they at, anyway? He took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them... "Then their eyes were opened, and they *recognized* him..."<sup>5</sup> They did not recognize him in the stories the other disciples told of his resurrection... "then their eyes were opened..." Not when Jesus joined them on their walk—not even when he broke open scripture for them to understand it better, but

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 24:12.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 24:16.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 24:28.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 24:30.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 24:31.

*then*—when he took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them. *Then* their broken hopes for a Messiah were mended into something new and unexpected. *Then* they recognized him as their Lord and their God and their Savior.

And so it goes for us as well. It is when we meet Jesus at the Welcome Table; the Communion Table; the Lord's Table, it is *then* that we know him most fully. Exhibit A: As soon as the disciples in this morning's reading take the bread, Jesus vanishes from their sight. A post-resurrection experience of Jesus *will* confound our earthly expectations. But it does much, much more as well. It puts us back together.

We are all broken people... every single one of us, without exception. It might be that our job is falling apart on us. We may have recently lost a friend or family member; or maybe even a few in a row. Or maybe one relationship or another is in tatters—whether it is one with a passing acquaintance, a child or parent, or our most dearly beloved. Maybe our broken relationship is with God. Maybe we are turning over some outmoded, broken idea about God and losing heart. We are *all* at least a little bit broken sometimes.

The earliest known Christian communion service speaks to the power of communion to mend our brokenness and unite us in God. Hear these words from the Didache, which include *the earliest known* Christian communion prayer:

And concerning the broken bread:

We thank Thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. *Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom...*

Through the brokenness of the bread, which has been known as Christ's body from the earliest times, we are gathered together with Christ in the glory of God's presence *here and now*. Christ is broken for us so that our brokenness may be mended. This is why I get so excited on communion Sundays—because partaking in the sacrament can provide us a way to experience Christ directly and powerfully, and to grow closer in God together.

Is that going to happen every time we break bread together in Jesus' name? That certainly has not been my experience, which is why I invite people to approach Communion from wherever they are on that particular day. Some days taking communion *is* just a snack with friends. Some days *it is* a symbolic action. *Then* there are those other days—those days when the experience opens our eyes to Christ's presence in our hearts, even as the bread disappears from our eyes.

Cleopas and his companion had a day like that, and boy did it fire them up! They got so excited about it that they ran back to the community from which they had just broken off. They made a perilous journey through darkness which was likely to be full of robbers to share in their newly received good—no, make that *amazing—news!*

That's the kind of feeling I get from the Lord's Table during Communion, at least when things go well. How about you? I have to confess that Communion can be terribly confusing, and maybe even scary on some level. Some days it might just seem like a better idea to leave it behind and take a geographical cure by moving *away* from Communion. I see that idea play out here in our church a lot. Without fail our Communion Sundays are our most sparsely attended. I suppose because they challenge us, either to believe something confusing or to spend a little extra time in Church. I have heard that second reason offered pretty often. And I have to tell you I work on it. I have clocked the last several Communion Services and they have all been just about one hour and fifteen minutes. If you will recall, that was the length of an average service when I first started preaching here.

As to the belief piece, that is really between each of us and God. But I think pushing ourselves on attending and embracing communion is really important. And I encourage you to help me spread the word and get people in here. Especially if you are here a lot already—more company at the Lord's Table hurts no one. And I think that is exactly why Cleopas and his friend *ran* back to meet with the other Disciples. When more of us gather in Christ's name, we feel God's presence more profoundly. And that is nowhere more possible than during Communion.

When Jesus explained scripture to Cleopas and his companion, they were intrigued. They even wanted to spend a meal with him. But when Jesus met them in the breaking of bread *then* their eyes were open, their hearts were set on fire, and they were willing to risk much for the sake of Jesus. And so it goes for us as well. This story was written by people like us *for* people like us.

Are we ready for that? Are we ready to risk letting God be broken for us so that our brokenness may be mended? Are we ready to invite Jesus to dinner on the off chance of encountering the living God? I pray we are.

Amen.



**Luke 24:13-35**

<sup>13</sup>Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup>but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup>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?” <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>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.” <sup>25</sup>Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” <sup>27</sup>Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. <sup>28</sup>As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup>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?” <sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” <sup>35</sup>Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.