

Two disciples walked the road to Emmaus on Easter evening. A stranger joined them.
They told this stranger their story, they shared a meal
And they were no longer strangers

When we listen to this wondrous story from the gospel of Luke, known as the Road to Emmaus, we tend to focus on the breaking of the bread which reveals Jesus' presence to the not quite believing disciples.

What we miss is all that it took to get those doubting disciples to the table that evening. We miss the rhythm of that long walk, and the testimony of Cleopas and his unnamed companion, as they poured out their sorrow, dashed hopes, broken dreams, perhaps even a bit of fear. We miss the fine biblical lecture Jesus gives, stretching out God's story from the very beginning through the wilderness, to the Romans and the cross and the one named Jesus.

By the time evening began to fall, they knew him enough to be concerned about him. Stay with us; share our bread with us. Perhaps they hoped for more stories, perhaps they were worried for his safety.

Then, strangely, Jesus picks up the bread; acting as host instead of guest at this meal. He took the bread, blessed it and broke it.....and their eyes were opened and they saw Jesus. This man who was a stranger on those long miles, was now Jesus with them. Were not our hearts burning within us? they asked. It wasn't just the bread, it was the miles they walked together, and the stories they told one another.

Many of us know that meals have a funny way of making friends out of strangers: the intimacy of gathering around a table, passing the dishes to one another, the sharing of family stories, perhaps a few small revelations as well.

In the gospel of Luke, folks are always getting together to eat. Jesus eats with every kind of outcast and misfit. By the end of Luke's gospel, Jesus is very good at turning a loaf of bread and cup of wine into an opportunity to turn strangers into friends; unbelievers to disciples. It is a prime place for him to make himself known....in the breaking of the bread.

So I ask “What if every meal was holy?” What if we sat down at table with perfect strangers and expected to meet Jesus?

It might require that we walk a couple miles with them before our eyes would be opened. We would need to meet them on their journey, to listen carefully to their stories of sorrow and loss, of crushing need or misfortune.

Perhaps if we gave those strangers the space to paint us a picture of who they are and the life they lead.

Perhaps if we simply listened, locking judgment into a steel vault, and offered them a safe place where they didn't need to hide themselves or the difficulties in which they found themselves.

Perhaps if we were willing to sit with those who are suffering, without trying to correct or fix.

Just to listen. As if they were worthy of our time and attention.

As if they were people who mattered.

How might that change our conversations? Could that make the meatloaf we share HOLY? Could we be blessed with a glimpse of Jesus **in the face of the stranger?** Could we **BE** the face of Jesus **to the stranger?**

Trinity has been committed to feeding the hungry throughout this time of cosmic upset. But I wonder, Could not the food be but a pathway to a deeper hunger? Could our neighbors be hungry to be seen, to be counted as worthy of our time and attention? In a community surrounded by working farms, could food be the bridge between strangers? What is their story? Our story? Jesus' story? Where do we connect? AS I listen again to the Emmaus story I think the bread and wine are the way Jesus invites these two into new life in him. Isn't that a part of our baptismal call as well?

For the last eleven weeks, we have abstained from the meal of holy communion. Many are clamoring for pastors or bishops or governors or even the president to find a way, to make it happen, to pretend it is safe to gather in a close space around a shared meal. We miss the sacrament of a holy meal.

But just perhaps The Spirit is leading us to take our hunger deeper and do important work among our neighbors. To extend the table of Holy Communion to include the strangers around us. To think bigger and to commit to the important work of serving our neighbors right here and now. Covid 19 did not cause the food insecurity of Herkimer county and our neighbors are hungry for more than a good meal. This Emmaus story

suggests that we need to to walk a few miles with them, listen to their stories, and count them as worthy. Who are these people and how can we serve them in Christ's name?

Let's learn all we can about the needs of our neighbors; about those already doing this work, about the gaps in the supply chain, about where the food comes from and what sources aren't being tapped. Let's dig deeper, learn more, and pray for God's guidance on how we, the people of faith at Trinity on Henry Street, can do the holy work of servants.

Thank you for your unfailing generosity; certainly it has fed hungry people. Maybe in this time where we wait for the bread to once again be broken in the sacrament, we are being called in our hunger to do the important work of meeting the soul hunger of our neighbors. Lord, lead us and give us courage.