

“Formed for Presence by Broken Bread”
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A Series on Practicing God’s Presence in the Lord’s Supper

Luke 24:13-35

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See the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

Surely the presence of the Lord was in that place. But they did not know it!

Surely he was with them, joining as they walked along. But they were too downcast to notice.

Surely he was leading them in the greatest Bible study ever! But they did not recognise his voice.

Surely he was with them, face to face. But they were kept from seeing it was him.

Surely he was with them, when they invited him to shelter for the night. But they did not know him . . . until he broke the bread.

II

As people of Jesus, we are not simply following an idea. We are not only following a teaching. We are not just following an inspiration. We are following a person. A person who is as much with us as any other person is. In fact, even more. Before it is anything else, belonging to Jesus is a relationship. In our relationship with Jesus, we are opened into relationship with the fullness of God.

Surely the presence of Jesus is in this place.

But how can we know it?

One way Jesus gives us is in breaking the bread together, and drinking from the cup together, at his Table.

III

Jesus’ presence with us is a gift, his gift, always his gift.

He is not a mirror, mirror on the wall. He is not a genie in a lamp. He is not at the end of some 1-800 number, an operator standing by.

Jesus is with us, but on his terms, not ours.

Our knowing that he is with us is also his gift.

I can pray as hard as I can to know his presence. I can fill my mind with the greatest thoughts about his presence. I can try to walk his ways faithfully. I can try to give my heart fully. I can sit in silence. I can sing with exuberance. All are good.

Yet I know Jesus is with me, only because he wants me to know.

They did not know Jesus was with them, those two walking along the road. They had seen him countless times, in the flesh. They had heard those rumours of his resurrection that day. Yet even when they were talking about him, and even when they were listening to him, they did not know it was him. Why?

“They were prevented from recognizing him.”

Grammar-experts call that the “divine passive.”¹ Something was done to them: *“They were prevented. . . .”* Who did the preventing?

“They were prevented,” that is, until Jesus took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then, *“their eyes were opened. . . .”*

It was Jesus’ gift, them knowing that he was with them.

IV

We call it different things: Lord’s Supper, Eucharist, Holy Communion, Mass, and so on. His Table is a gift Jesus gives us. It is a vital way we know his presence. Not by magic hocus-pocus, but because Jesus chooses to become known when eat the bread and drink the wine.

In our first centuries when we were a minority movement, we met in each others’ homes.² Our gatherings were in the same places we were doing daily life. We shared the bread and wine, often as part of a full meal. The home might be large or small, ornate or simple. Sometimes we met in secret. Was Jesus there at his Table? Yes, many people bore witness to that.

When Christianity became legal, then privileged, we moved mainstream. And we moved our worship into specially designated buildings. The church got churches! The Lord’s Table became a special thing in a special place, managed by an officially sanctioned expert. Those were centuries of great growth, success, wealth and power. Was Jesus still at his Table? Yes, many people bore witness to that.

¹ For the divine passive a general concept in writing, see www.dailywritingtips.com/divine-passive-voice. And for a helpful reflection on its use in the Bible check out this blog post: www.harvardichthus.org/2015/03/the-gift-of-the-passive-divine

² David E. Fitch, *Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines that Shape the Church for Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity 2016), 50. I’ve adapted this historic overview from his discussion on pp. 65-67.

Over more generations, thinking about Jesus' presence focused increasingly on the things of Communion themselves. Real bread and real wine, obviously. Really Jesus' body? Really Jesus' blood? Jesus is really here, most of us agreed. (Even we Protestants!) What we argued about is how Jesus is here, at his Table. The Table itself became broken as we fought over it. Amid this furious controversy, was Jesus still at his Table? Yes, many people bore witness to that.

More recently, worry about alcoholism (and with thanks to Mr. Welch), led many to switch from wine to grape juice. Knowing about germs, and enamoured with efficiency, we started using individual glasses and finely cut bread. Quick, clean and safe. [Okay, that's too much!]

How we've shared Jesus' Meal sure has changed! Is he still at his Table? Yes, many of us bear witness to that.

You've noticed the Table this morning.³ It feels weird, doesn't it. As we celebrate Jesus' meal today, notice if the Table being here changes your sense of Jesus' Meal.

Imagine if our whole worship space was built differently. What if the Table was always in the midst of us all, with our seating curved around it. We'd see each other by looking over Jesus' Table. Would that change our experience of Communion? Would Jesus still be present? Of course, it's not up to us. Jesus' presence is always a gift. Still, based on past experience, I think he would be.

V

Why the Table, though? Is Jesus any more present here than in other places?

A theologian, Stanley Hauerwas, said this:

I have no doubt that Jesus is present by His Spirit at work in the world outside the church, yet the church, the gathering around the Eucharist, is the one place where we know He is present. And so it is here where we learn to recognize Jesus and his work from whence we can move into the world and see him clearly there as well.⁴

So we don't come around Jesus' Table because it is the only place, or one of the few places he is. Jesus is everywhere the Kingdom of God's Heaven is breaking into the world.

Coming to the Table is vital because in this event of sharing in his body broken and blood poured together, we are fundamentally formed by Jesus' presence. Then, because he has so changed us, we can go, knowing and responding to his presence elsewhere. This

³ Instead of its usual place on the raised chancel (where only the minister and choir regularly go), I moved it to the floor, in front of the first pew.

⁴ Fitch quotes this from memory and is unsure of the source. See Fitch, 215 note 4.

Table-event is training for every other event.⁵ Jesus changes us. He changes our life together. And he is changing every place, every event, because wherever Jesus is, his New Creation is breaking in.

VI

Within their home in Emmaus, Jesus gave that disciple-couple the gift of recognizing him.⁶ In his taking the bread, blessing, breaking and sharing it, they finally saw him.

Around his Table we see him.

See what his welcome looks like. Then, go see how is his welcoming out there.

See Jesus forgiving. Then, go see his forgiveness out there.

See how he uses power. Then, see it out there.

See his generosity. Then, out there.

His love here. Out there.

His sacrifice for us here. There. . . .

Jesus here. . . .

⁵ Fitch, 51.

⁶ Only one of them is named, Cleopas. Usually the other is assumed to be another male disciple. But why couldn't it have been a woman? Perhaps Cleopas' wife?