

Young Helen Keller was imprisoned by her circumstances. She could neither see nor hear. She could feel with her hands, but without sight or hearing, how could she know what it was she was feeling?

One day her teacher Ann Sullivan took Helen down a familiar path to the well house. Someone was drawing water there. Ann let the water run over one of Helen's hands and in sign language spelled into the other, WATER. Suddenly something happened within Helen. Something dramatic. Something life changing. It was only a five letter word, but for Helen Keller it was a gigantic breakthrough. She now had a name for a familiar experience water. If this experience had a name, other familiar objects and sensations must have names as well. It was as if she had suddenly burst forth from a closely guarded prison. **Now she could be a whole person, experiencing the world as a real human being in spite of her handicaps.**

**Such a breakthrough is always exciting. Such a breakthrough came to two of the disciples of Jesus.** They were making their way to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were in mourning. Their Master had been crucified. They, along with the other disciples of the Galilean, were stunned beyond words. They thought he was the one who had come to redeem Israel but now he was dead-crucified like a common criminal.

They poured out their grief to one another as they slowly walked toward Emmaus. They were also mulling over some disturbing news they had received earlier in the day. Some of the women had been to the tomb early in the morning. His body was not there. Instead they encountered an angel who said that Jesus was not dead but alive. What could all this mean? Who could have stolen his body from his grave? What should they and the other disciples do now?

As they walked and had conversation between themselves, a stranger joined them and walked with them. Breaking in on the conversation, he asked, *"What is it you are talking about?"*

*"Could you be the only visitor to Jerusalem,"* they asked, *"Who does not know the tragic events that have occurred there the last few days?"* Then one of the disciples shared with this stranger all that had taken place who Jesus was, what had happened to him, as well as their present grief and confusion.

Then the stranger said, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and the Prophets, he interpreted to them everything in the scriptures relevant to the ministry of the Messiah.

As they neared Emmaus it became evident that the stranger intended to journey farther, beyond the little village. They begged him to stay with them for the evening to share some more of these wonderful new insights into God's plan and purpose. He did stay. **That evening, when they were gathered around the table, he took the bread and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to them and it was like the experience Helen Keller had as the water trickled over her one hand while Ann Sullivan spelled out WATER with the other.** They knew who this stranger was. It was Jesus. The story of the women was true. He is alive!

Coming alive to Christ. How does it happen? Can it happen to us? Yes, it can. **Let me suggest two ways we modern day followers can have an Emmaus experience.**

**THE FIRST WAY IS THROUGH THE BREAD OF LIFE WHICH IS THE WORD.** *"Did not our hearts burn within us,"* asked those two disciples, *"as he broke to us the bread of life?"* For most of us, that is where we will begin in our encounter with the risen Christ. IN HIS WORD...

**It is a shame that many of us have let our daily encounter with the Word slide.** Those who discipline themselves to make daily DEVOTIONS and reading of the Word a part of their lives invariably find themselves drawn closer to the Master. **John Calvin was fond of comparing the Scriptures to a pair of "spectacles."** He often said that even though we could know something about God from the wonders of creation, such knowledge was fuzzy and incomplete without the aid of the Bible. Calvin insisted that just as people with failing vision need glasses to read even the most beautifully printed volumes, **we who are fallen creatures must look through the Scripture to "read" the beauty of God.**

I read about a depressed songwriter who battled the successes of the past and fears of the future. He was bankrupt. He had a cerebral hemorrhage that left him partially paralyzed. He worried that the creative spark that had made him rich was gone. **He was depressed.** The **scriptural** texts that were his friends and that his soul could hear were texts such as "**Why have you forsaken me?**"

In the midst of his depression, a man came by who had compiled **scriptures** together in a semi-orderly fashion. He suggested that the songwriter put some music to the text. The writer looked at the text that read, "**He was despised and rejected of humanity,**" and he felt that way, too. He read texts of the one for whom "**no one had pity.**" He read about the one who trusted God still. He read the words, "**I know that my redeemer lives.**" He read the words "**rejoice**" and "**hallelujah.**" **That night George Frederic Handel was blessed by a "gentle cosmic light."** He was led slowly out of darkness by a desire to write music at a feverish pitch. He worked tirelessly for days until, with manuscript complete, he dropped into a seventeen-hour, death-like sleep. A doctor was summoned to see if he was **alive.** **Out of depression came the light of the Messiah.** Out of that depression was left for us a light that would light the corridors of the lives of countless millions for all ages. Out of that darkness, a man in a deep depression began, as Stevenson said of the lamplighter, "punching holes in the darkness."

**YES, THROUGH THE "BREAKING OF THE BREAD-GOD'S WORD... We encounter the RISEN CHRIST... in the breaking of the bread which is the life and the Word of our life WE ARE RISEN WITH HIM!!!**

**THE OTHER PLACE WE ARE MOST LIKELY TO ENCOUNTER THE RISEN CHRIST IS IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD WHICH IS HIS BODY.** *It is significant that it was when Jesus took the bread, blessed it and broke it that the disciples knew who he was!*

Hearts have been touched for 2,000 years when persons have taken the bread and the cup and heard those timeless words, "**This is my body which was broken for you. This is my blood which was shed for you.**" Part of the power of that sacrament is that **WE EXPERIENCE IT TOGETHER.** We are Christ's family and we feel that in a most beautiful way when symbolically we are gathered around his table.

**Fellowship is at the heart of the body of Christ.** *We are not "Lone Ranger" Christians. The communion table forever is our reminder of that.*

There is a wonderful example of the "oneness" of Christian believers in Scott Peck's book, **THE DIFFERENT DRUM.**

The story concerns a monastery that had fallen on hard times. There were only five old monks left in the abbot and four brothers, all over seventy in age. In the woods near the monastery was a hut that was visited from time to time by a rabbi from a nearby town. One day the abbot was led to come to the rabbi to ask his advice for their dying monastery. The rabbi responded that he had no advice to give. But he did leave the abbot with this strange message: "**The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you.**"

When the abbot returned to the monastery, his fellow monks gathered around him to ask, "**Well, what did the rabbi say?**" "He couldn't help," the abbot answered. "We just wept and read the Torah together. The only thing he did say, just as I was leaving it was something cryptic was that the Messiah is one of us. I don't know what he meant."

In the days and weeks and months that followed, the old monks pondered this and wondered whether there was any possible significance to the rabbi's words. The Messiah is one of us? Could he possibly have meant one of us monks here at the monastery? If that's the case, which one? Do you suppose he meant the abbot? Yes, if he meant anyone, he probably meant Father Abbot. He has been our leader for more than a generation.

On the other hand, he might have meant Brother Thomas. Certainly Brother Thomas is a holy man. Everyone knows that Thomas is a man of light.

Certainly he could not have meant Brother Elred! Elred gets crotchety at times. But come to think of it, even though he is a thorn in people's sides, when you look back on it, Elred is virtually always right. Often very right. Maybe the rabbi did mean brother Elred.

But surely not Brother Phillip. Phillip is so passive, a real nobody. But then, almost mysteriously, he has a gift for somehow always being there when you need him. He just magically appears by your side. Maybe Phillip is the Messiah.

Of course the rabbi didn't mean me. He couldn't possibly have meant me. I'm just an ordinary person. Yet supposing he did? Suppose I am the Messiah? O God, not me. I couldn't be that much for you, could I?

**As they contemplated in this manner, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one among them might be the Messiah. And on the off, off chance that each monk himself might be the Messiah, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect.**

Because the forest in which it was situated was beautiful, it so happened that people still occasionally came to visit the monastery to picnic on its tiny lawn, to wander along some of its paths, even now and then to go into the dilapidated chapel to meditate. As they did so, without even being conscious of it, they sensed this aura of extraordinary respect that now began to surround the five old monks and seemed to radiate out from them and permeate the atmosphere of the place. There was something strangely attractive, even compelling, about it. Hardly knowing why, they began to come back to the monastery more frequently to picnic, to play, to pray. **They began to bring their friends to show them this special place. And their friends brought their friends.**

Then it happened that some of the younger men who came to visit the monastery started to talk more and more with the old monks. After a while one asked if he could join them. Then another. And another. **So within a few years the monastery had once again become a thriving order and, thanks to the rabbi's gift, a vibrant center of light and spirituality in the realm.**

**That is what the table of Christ is all about, is it not treating one another as we would Christ?** Even reverencing ourselves as we would Christ.

**WE ARE HERE FOR TWO MAIN REASONS... To share the bread of life—the WORD and to break the bread which is his BODY. WORD & SACRAMENT. REVELATION AND RELATIONSHIP.**

**These are where humanity and divinity meet. That is who we are and what we are about.**

**So today we long for an Emmaus kind of experience as we proclaim the Word and we share together in Christian fellowship and worship.** We know that the risen Christ is among us and we pray that he will make himself known to us in the **"BREAKING OF THE BREAD" of life.**

**As they walked along the road they SHARED WITH ONE ANOTHER "all the things that had just happened"...**

As you walk your Road of "Emmaus" Today, know that the RISEN Jesus is there TO TAKE YOUR HAND... AND HELP YOU ALONG... TO SEE YOU THROUGH.... SO, draw strength from his WORD & his MEAL, when you are able. For, REMEMBER...He Has RISEN, HE HAS RISEN INDEED, ALLELUIA!! Amen.