

This week marks 40 years since Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot. No one in this country since has come close to his ability to hold crowds spell-bound in hope for liberation and justice for all. He had an amazing gift of speech using what some would call our first language of faith – biblical references - “I have been to the mountain top...I may not make it to the Promised Land”... scriptural phrases that paint an image of a shared faith in one God that binds listeners together as God’s people.

Let’s talk of the Promised Land as the land of freedom,
the time of liberation,
the land of freely flowing milk and honey –
the time of banquets and feasting –
the land of breaking bread together –
the time where hunger is finally satisfied and thirst relieved.

Many remember the day MLK was shot and could tell us where you were when you heard the news. Even our youngest have heard the story. Here, in Washington the city erupted with racial clashes, fires were set, curfew was declared, and the military was dispatched to street corners. In Washington DC hungry, thirsty people with hearts heavy with anger, grief, and lost hope were set on the road to Emmaus that day.

The first journey to Emmaus has two of Jesus’ followers leaving Jerusalem on the day of Jesus’ resurrection – or his mysterious disappearance could more accurately describe their understanding of the events. They’ve been told by women that Jesus is no longer in the tomb. They can’t even get comfort from being near his place of burial. What sense hanging around, staying in Jerusalem now? Their dreams have been shattered, their hope ripped from them. Heavy with grief, disappointment, and disillusionment they start on their way to Emmaus.

Cleopas, and a companion - possibly/probably his wife – They couldn’t bear to stay in Jerusalem. They leave; their steps are slow. They kept talking about Jesus – their time with him, then how he was taken from them and how he died a horrible death. You know, you’ve done it yourselves, you know how grieving people need to talk, to tell their story/ies of their loved one who has died.

Seemingly alone and despairing are these two until a stranger appears and asks what they are talking about.

They are devastated – their whole world has fallen around them, and here is someone who doesn't know. So they tell their sad story to a complete stranger who must have been oblivious or indifferent to the crucifixions of not just one, but 3 people just 3 short days ago – although one was all they cared about. For he was the one they had hoped would be their savior. And now he's gone – not just gone from them, but gone from his tomb. For them, the story ends there. They're probably headed back to their pre-Jesus life.

But, this clueless stranger starts talking – first he calls them fools and then he tells their story. Jesus goes to the heart of their faith, their hope – he goes to the bible and he tells them with familiar people and story, in familiar language about the Messiah and what God has done for them. But he tells their story in a new way.

When he falls silent, they are near their destination and Jesus acts as if he'll be going on to catch up with the next traveling persons needing company. But, it's evening and the two disciples can't quite let him go yet – they have a burning inside they don't understand; they want more from this mysterious stranger. And, so they invite him to stay for the evening. They feed their hunger and thirst, and at the table, he took bread, blessed it and broke it. They recognize him and he immediately is gone.

Their excitement sends them joyfully back to Jerusalem to compare resurrection appearances with the others.

“...they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made know to them in the breaking of the bread.”

In their journey of grief and sorrow, on their retreat from where the worst had happened, Jesus met them. He walked with them. He taught them how God had turned death into Good News.

Jesus broke bread with them – he shared a meal – it was oddly familiar. This was not the first time Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. Indeed, throughout Jesus' life, his meals showed his character, his way of being in the world – and therefore how his followers are to be in the world.

From the Bible we learn that Jesus accepts and extends an invitation to and from anyone. In Jesus' world/life, ALL are invited to join the party. He rubbed elbows and supped with everyone from Pharisees to tax collectors and sinners to spontaneous picnics with thousands of people on the spur of the moment. And, he forced others to do the same, breaking down cultural, religious and socio-economic barriers, too.

There had to be some behind the scenes support to make this possible. Those with resources, food and plenty shared what they had with those who had little or none. I'd like to think that if the host didn't extend the invitation to the hungry, Jesus did, or those who were hungry stood at the door shouting until they were fed, or they crashed the party until all were invited so that none went hungry.

If there hadn't been such controversy over his table companions, perhaps our central act of remembering Jesus, of receiving his presence, strength and nourishment would not be the Eucharist - a meal.

A meal that is invitation to all people.

A meal that breaks down barriers.

A meal that feeds hungry souls.

A meal that celebrates God's gracious and saving actions – from breaking the bonds of slavery to providing food for the Israelites in the wilderness to a sacrifice of God's own son giving us the life with God we hunger for.

A meal that is a foretaste of the feast to come.

Hunger, fear and oppression were present in Jesus' day. 40 years ago hunger, fear and oppression were present. We have not reached the Promised Land yet. Today, hunger, fear and oppression are also present and we struggle with situations that have not yet been redeemed - racial equality in the US - still, religious wars, and ethnic oppression, local and global hunger. Even in their disappointment and grief, Jesus did not give up on the disciples, and he won't give up on us either.

He makes himself know to us "in the breaking of the bread..." and a meal becomes central to feeding hungry souls.

We come to the table because we are hungry and thirsty.

We receive an appetizer. Let us be impatient for the full course.

We come with thanks to God for the resources and plenty that God provides to the earth.

Let us share our resources with Community Family Life Service, our hungry neighbors of ward 6 and globally.

Come, let us break bread together.
Let our Eucharist remind us of Jesus' example to love and serve God by serving others.

Let our Eucharist remind us of God's call to strive for justice and love for all people.

Let our Eucharist lead us to wisely feed the hungry, clothe the naked and house the homeless with the amazing people, building and property that are at hand.

Let us come with joy as children of God to break bread together, to drink wine together, and to praise God together.

Amen.