

Easter Three: Blessed and Broken

The story known as the road to Emmaus has captured the imaginations of those of faith and many beyond for centuries. There are many works of art that attest to this and this experience of walking beside another without knowing who our companion really is until a particular moment or experience, has been used as a central metaphor in many works of literature. In the story of the road to Emmaus the cause of what, or whom, inflames their hearts is only revealed to the disciples in the breaking of the bread. And for us, the people who gather around the table at which bread is blessed and broken week by week, it is the central story, image and event that conveys the mystery and sacrament of life out of death. Henri Nouwen takes this image as the central structure of his work "Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World". He organises his understanding of the spiritual life around the steps of the Eucharist: bread is taken, blessed, broken and given. I want to borrow his shape and reflect with you how this ancient story is still at work for us, within us and among ourselves.

In a simple way we need to understand our selves as each part of the story – of the disciples on the road going about our life with heavy hearts believing the one we thought would be the answer having died and then feeling our hearts quicken within us as a strangers words touch us and make sense to us. And if we can imagine ourselves as the bread which is taken, blessed, broken and given we will understand even more fully the journey they were on.

To recognise that we are taken, or chosen, is the beginning of this reflection. To recognise that we are chosen may be relatively easy for some people of very certain faith but most of us struggle to know, let alone feel, chosen. And it is not only in the very general sense that God chooses to love people – because after all God created us and feels compassion toward us – but we are being asked to consider that we in particular are chosen, loved, wanted, desired, longed for by God. Just as last week it was Thomas being responded to by the resurrected Christ this week we hear a story about these two unnamed but particular disciples having an encounter with the Christ. Jesus not only appeared to the gathered disciples he appeared to many individuals, he made himself known to many particular people who needed the reassurance of a personal encounter to be convinced.

While the experience of faith is filled with many shared steps and beliefs it is always an intensely personal and individual journey and Jesus from the beginning seems to have understood this. Indeed it would seem that he spent the days and weeks between resurrection and ascension seeking out individuals and small groups and giving them reason to know that they were chosen specifically by him.

The bread once taken is then blessed. Blessing is something we in the church talk much about but maybe would struggle to say what we mean by that. In the church we are blessed just before we

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are sent out into the world again in the benediction. In Latin benediction means to speak good words. To be blessed is hear that good words are being spoken to us and of us. God is speaking good words to us and about us. God is whispering words of love into the ears of our hearts through - Scripture, creation, song, the words of those sent into our lives, the imagination of our hearts, works of art.

And we who ache to know blessing in our lives are also to be a source of blessing for others. I am sure that I have told you before that at my ordination the Archbishop anointed my hands and said from this day forward everything you do will either be a blessing to others or a withholding of blessing. It is true for all of us.

And having been blessed the bread is broken. The bread is broken as a living reminder that Jesus was broken for us. We have just spent the holy days of Easter reflecting on his having been broken for us and how that made life victorious over death, love victorious over hate, and grace over sin.

But this does not spare us from being a broken people, broken persons, each with our particular wounds. While it might be the general human condition to be broken in some way by life, our brokenness is unique, it is ours. Our brokenness is unique both because the events that break us open are unique but also having been broken open what is exposed is some deeply true aspect of ourselves. How we respond to our brokenness also of course increases our uniqueness. We are called upon to befriend, or at least to get to know, our brokenness. What we fear, loathe, and wish to avoid can be our best teacher, the very beginning of healing and growth. On Ash Wednesday I talked with you about learning from the spiritual traditions which honour death as a teacher, a wise travelling companion. Likewise our brokenness, although painful, can be gift in as much as it teaches us who we truly are, reveals our common bonds with others we thought different or less than us, and gives us opportunity to receive the tender ministries of others – divine and human. For paradoxically our brokenness builds our common humanity. We who know ourselves broken can scarcely be proud or remote to others in their brokenness. Just as grace can enter in by our wound so too grace can flow out of the wound.

For we are chosen, blessed and broken so that we might be given. As bread can only be shared when it has been broken into pieces so we can best be given when we know ourselves chosen, blessed and broken open. Our experiences, healing and growth has meaning in itself but it can prepare us for so much more. Our journeys are always toward the heart of God wherein lie all others who recognise themselves chosen, blessed and broken.

The road to Emmaus is always walked by one, two or more with the other one, the holy one, who makes himself made known to us in the blessing and the breaking of the bread. Even so, come Lord Jesus Christ.

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