

**6 April 2008 Easter 2 The blessing of the Bread  
1 Peter 1: 17-23; Luke 24: 13-35**

I have to confess this is my favourite Resurrection, because this is a Gospel in which we really can recognise ourselves. The dialogue between the two disciples and their unknown companion is just so human, so believable. Oh, we had hoped... Which if us hasn't felt like that some time?

It's barely a week since the disciples walked through an adoring crowd waving palm branches and even laying their coats on the ground for them to walk on. Jesus Christ Superstar! But now from those dizzy heights they're about as low and as devastated as it's possible to be. Oh, we had hoped. It's a sentence full of wistfulness and pathos and human longing. Luke was a doctor – he must have seen people's hopes crushed a thousand times. And that insight into our vulnerability and need, our aching for our best hopes to be fulfilled just pulses through this Gospel.

But just as night is falling, the time when things always look at their worst, another insight breaks through the darkness for the disciples and for us. And Luke delivers his message almost with a code – but one you don't need an Enigma Machine to break. He took, blessed, broke and gave. And instantly the disciples had kind of simultaneous, multiple flashbacks. A little boy's packed lunch to feed a multitude, the upper room and hundreds of bread-breakings with tax collectors and women of ill repute, and sometimes just themselves by a dusty roadside or in the desert. Not only that, the disciples knew that Jesus himself was taken, blessed, broken and given. And he told us we would be too – but don't be afraid he said, because I have overcome the world. When it all looks over, it ain't. We will be taken, blessed, broken, given away and it'll look like all our hopes have been scattered to the winds. But the meaning of Jesus is to show that this is not the end.

Years ago, when I was still a theology student I went as a helper with a party of handicapped people on a holiday to Vienna. This was with an organisation called ACROSS, which ran trips for people to get to Lourdes, but had expanded to arranging holidays all over Europe. Now for the people who went, and their carers too, there was kind of defiance about this. Because these were not folk with minor disabilities, but people with terminal illnesses and the most life-limiting kinds of handicaps. Like Anne, a young woman in her twenties who couldn't move any part of her body below her neck and was in the process of losing her sight, and who went everywhere flat on her back on a trolley bed, but who was studying law at Birmingham University, and wasn't prepared to miss out on anything from boats on the Danube to cable car rides up mountains. In the eyes of the world all hope might have seemed lost for Anne and all the others, only no-one seemed to have told them. Because these were resurrection people; these were Emmaus people – both for themselves and for those of us privileged to be with them.

On one of the Sundays of our holiday I found myself delegated, being an ordinand, to take a morning service for our group. We decided we would have what's called an agape, which is a sharing of food and drink as a symbol of all the love and sharing that we'd experienced through the week. So I duly prepared this, pinched a roll from the hotel breakfast table, found some grape juice and we gathered for our celebration. The Gospel for the day was the meal at Emmaus. Now at the time I was studying at Coates Hall, our theological college, where most of the students were extremely high church, the kind of ordinands who would tell you the eucharist wasn't valid if you didn't have six candles on the altar. This was a college where a spillage of consecrated wine was treated as a national emergency, where you'd hear serious discussions on topics such as: If a fly lands in the communion wine, do you have to consume the fly? So with that kind of background, even if I never shared that taste for ecclesiastical trivia, it did make me anxious to do things right, part of which was to make sure that these folk knew what this wasn't. In other words this was not a eucharist, not a mass – I wasn't ordained by then so it couldn't be. Anyway, having made this clear we read this story. He took, blessed, broke, gave, and their eyes were opened.

We then shared the bread and grape juice. And each and every person as they reached to each other from wheelchair, to wheelchair, to trolley bed, to the helper sitting next to them, to each and all, every single one of them said to their neighbour: The Body of Christ given for you; the Blood of Christ, shed for you. Now I had a moment of consternation here – this wasn't what was meant to happen. But the Spirit blows where it wills, and those folk, who knew more about suffering and being human and vulnerable – and being taken, blessed, broken, given away – more than I hope I'll ever know, they, the LIVING CHURCH, the true broken body of Jesus, they decided what this was. That bread and grape juice could not have been more consecrated if the Pope himself had laid hands on them.

They shared the scriptures, they broke the bread, and my eyes were opened. But the power of this story, is that Emmaus can be anywhere and almost anything. Just this week, walking my dog down by the river at St Bernard's Well, a pair of herons flew the whole length of the river from under the Dean Bridge as far towards Stockbridge as I could see, and my heart just lifted. There is no experience that God cannot use as bread for our joy. And the message of Emmaus is that that's what God is doing all the time. An ancient saying goes: Cut the log and you will find me, break the stone and I am there.

So when we pray, maybe we should ask as the disciples did: Stay with me, Lord. Break open the ordinary stuff of my life just as it is, and show me things I can scarcely imagine. This is the joy of the apostles that's reverberated right down the ages to this very morning. As if those two breathless disciples just burst in at the back there, saying: you'll never guess what's happened to us. Like them, may we know joy, in the breaking of the bread. Amen.