

Bread and wine:

For I received from the Lord Himself that which I passed on to you [it was given to me personally], that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was treacherously delivered up and while His betrayal was in progress took bread,

And when He had given thanks, He broke [it] and said, Take, eat. This is my body, which is broken for you. Do this to call me [affectionately] to remembrance.

Similarly when supper was ended, He took the cup also, saying, this cup is the new covenant [ratified and established] in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink [it], to call Me [affectionately] to remembrance.

For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are representing and signifying and proclaiming the fact of the Lord's death until He comes [again].

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (Amplified Bible)



Idea:

The partaking of bread and wine symbolises Christ's promise to be with us until he returns. Consider how to use these symbols in a creative way to illustrate God's faithful promise.

When he broke the bread

... And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Luke 24:27-35

Our journey in faith towards Christ is a long and rich one. It is full of pain and contradictions but also deep love and wonder. This journey that we read of here, after the resurrection, is not only a literal journey but a journey of understanding more of the significance of who Christ is and what he has done.

Three days after Christ's death, two people were walking along the road to Emmaus, a village roughly seven miles from Jerusalem; one of them was called Cleopas. As they walked along, they naturally wanted to talk about the events of Jesus' death and its aftermath – after all nothing like this had ever happened before because this had been no ordinary man. So absorbed were they in their talk that they scarcely noticed when a third person drew alongside and walked with them. Jesus asked them what they were discussing and why they looked so sad.

Cleopas assumed that this man must be a stranger if he hadn't known what had happened because *everybody* would surely know by now about Jesus' death. So between the two disciples they told Jesus how he had been crucified and how they had hoped that he would save Israel but this seemed impossible now, and how some of the faithful women they knew had gone to his tomb and found it empty. Not only this but the women claimed that they had seen angels who said that in fact, Jesus was alive.

The apparent stranger rebukes them for their foolishness and therefore begins to explain the scriptures to them, revealing how everything that had happened had been predicted in history and was the will of God. By the time they reached Emmaus they were understandably tired and hungry with their intense conversation and walking. Jesus seemed to want to go on ahead but in true fellowship the disciples urged him to stay for a meal. So Jesus, still yet a stranger to them, accepts their hospitality. It is here that we come to the climax of this story. Not only has Jesus had to listen to his disciples discussing him without their knowing him, but he has had to give them a very long and comprehensive Bible lesson - at the end of which they still don't recognise his identity!

Now at the table Jesus breaks the bread and blesses it, and the disciples recognise him at last. He is no stranger, but their own Saviour. He has redeemed Israel after all. Then he disappears. Cleopas and his friend are so excited at the revelation that they don't even want to finish their meal. Instead they hurry back to Jerusalem overwhelmed by this extraordinary encounter, so that they can share the experience with their fellow disciples.

Before we can make hasty judgements about these disciples and their initial inability to recognise Christ, we have to remember the many times when we too fail to see him staring us in the face. We can be so busy looking for Christ that we fail to see that he is already here. And many are the moments when we come to understand aspects of our faith over long periods of time. We are not quick thinkers, like most of the disciples we don't grasp our faith easily. The obvious is very often obscure to us.

It seems likely therefore, that it was only through the symbolic ritual of breaking bread that the two disciples could recognise Jesus. This symbol and not the narrative was how Jesus was made present to them.

If Good Friday represents the Old Testament and Easter Sunday represents the New, then Holy Saturday is the bridge of hope that connects the two. Jesus is the miracle of this bridge. So Easter Sunday is a new beginning without parallel, as if Life were arising from Death, the light from the dark, the new promise. A new love is waiting to embrace us when we joyfully believe in the risen Lord. When the stone is rolled away from all our doubts, our fears and all the life has dealt us, when we are able to stand in the presence of our God, then we will have become what we were born to be.

The meal at Emmaus was both the last supper of Christ on earth and the first celebration of the risen Christ in the Eucharist. The thread of love is unbroken – Christ was, is and is to come at every point in our faith journey.

Spiritual exercise

Imagine Jesus is explaining the Scriptures as you travel on the road to Emmaus with the two disciples; what would make your heart burn within you?

Imagine you are watching Jesus bless the bread that evening and you recognise him as your Lord; what emotions do you feel?

Reflect on when you receive the Eucharist at church; how does this passage enrich your faith?

Consider the bread and wine; in what ways are they symbols of God's faithfulness to you?

What does Jesus' resurrection mean in your life?

Prayer

Risen Lord,

may your loving power that shatters tombs,

shatter any doubt in me.

My heart burns within me as the scriptures are fulfilled

and your faithfulness is revealed.

You are rising in my heart,

your grace is all I need.

Amen

Eucharist

I am not worthy to receive You.
Sunlight slants through high windows
across a line of faces and upturned hands.
My own cupped hands are not empty.
They are brimming with weariness,
tired words of denial and betrayal.
Trade and exchange.

I am not worthy to receive You
but only say the word.
This now is the interior moment.
In a cave of silence, heads bowed,
we hold out our hearts like begging bowls
for the One who has shared many meals
with us, and who will go on giving
no matter what.

I am not worthy to receive You
but only say the word
and I shall be healed.
Now there is the hush of peace,
as we move back to our seats,
our hands empty, our hearts full,
transaction completed.
We kneel in gratitude.
The miracle is not in the bread made body
but in the darkness turned to light
Joy Cowley