

“nepO”
April 6, 2008
Geneseo United Methodist Church
Pastor Craig Ferguson

Luke 24:13-16, 25-27, 30-35

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

²⁵ Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

After the way I dressed last week, and the fact that you all did not run out screaming, and I see that most of you are back this week, I thought I would start this week's message by telling you a story about my last trip to the bar.

There I was sitting at the table when I saw this string of a character walk up to the bar and ask for a drink. It was an intense moment as I saw the bar tender look him up and down. Then he looked right at him and said, "you look a little like a string to me. Didn't you see the sign on the door? We don't serve strings in here, you better move down the road to the string bar.

I shook my head in agreement. There was no room in this tavern for a string. After all, we know the kind of work they do; it seems like they are

always coming untied at the most inappropriate times. They can't hold down a paper weight let alone a job. Oh, and not to mention they come in every color imaginable, they must have some inbreeding problems.

As I looked around it seemed like the whole tavern was in agreement, this string had to go. At first he started to disagree, then he simply hung his head and walked out the door, ashamed for even existing.

Served him right I thought. How dare he think himself to be as good as us three-stranded ropes. I peeked out the window to watch him go, but outside I saw the funniest thing. That string looked like he was pulling his hair out. He started smashing his head into the wall, then role around in the dirt. I just sat in amazement as I saw his tantrum explode into a full blown frenzy of insanity. Then he just stopped. He was now crumpled over, bound up in knot after knot, dirty, and his hair was frazzled in all directions. He was hardly identifiable. I was too stunned to speak as he brushed himself off and walked back in the door of our fine establishment.

Again he walked up to the bar tender. This time he disposed of his polite demeanor and demanded a drink. The bar tender who had not seen anything looked him up and down. (I was sure he was going to call the bouncer to have this nut removed) Then he said, "you look new around here, I don't think I have seen any of your kind before, but you look kind of like a string?"

Just as I was about to shout across the room to tell the bar tender he was right, the string spoke up. "Nope, I'm a frayed knot."

Now I am sure many of you have heard that joke before. It has been around for a while, and some of you might say that a bar joke is not appropriate in church, but the idea is that it could have been any establishment. It could have been restaurant, a hotel, a coffee shop, a library, or a church. In fact, in surveys, most people in America feel more comfortable walking into a bar than they do walking into a church for the first time. Like the string experienced, there seems to be that feeling of judgment, and like every eye is on you.

It is interesting to me that the string was not welcomed in that bar until he made himself something that he was (knot – haha get it).

But how many people after feeling rejected for the first time, walk away, never dawning the doors of that facility again. They have been hurt, offended, disenfranchised, so they turn their back and walk away.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus must have felt like a string. Like all the disciples, they watched Jesus as he was despised and rejected. They saw the city and the chief priests turn on him. They saw him crucified and buried, and now they must have felt that the door was closed. Even more than that, I have a feeling that they were beginning to lose their sense of identity. They were no longer sure that Jesus was the Messiah, and they didn't understand why he had to die. Like many people do, they were walking away from what they believed, because they no longer felt welcomed. Look at these pitiful disciples; giving up, going home, defeated, demoralized, having literally lost their faith.

Emmaus was 7 miles away, a decent walk which provided plenty of time for discussion. These two disciples were talking about everything they had seen, and their confusion about Jesus. Then this stranger shows up, strangely enough, whom they don't recognize. It seems as though he had not heard of any of the recent events in Jerusalem, but he instantly takes authority, calls them fools, and starts teaching them just like Jesus would have done. Hmm these guys must be real dense not to figure that out.

Then later that night as the guest of the house, Jesus broke the bread, as he did at the last supper. Only at that point, when the bread was broken, were their eyes finally opened.

When we come to the Lord's Table, we all have our own beliefs. Some churches only offer communion to their members. Furthermore, some people will not receive it unless they feel they are in right relationship with God. In these perspectives, Communion has a very exclusive feel to it. But here in this passage, Jesus intersects the lives of two who had lost their faith, who didn't know what to believe, who were walking away from the door, and even though Jesus calls them fools, he breaks the bread and offers it to them.

In my mind, this is a different concept of how we are to celebrate Holy Communion. It tells me that everyone is invited, and that in receiving, it may open the eyes of some.

Now let me ask a few probing questions. How many people feel like strings in this world? How many disciples have lost their faith? How many people have desired to come to the table only to feel that they are not welcomed? How many, when the door is slammed on them, simply keep walking to the next place that will welcome them?

Let me ask another question: As Christians, are we commissioned by Christ to be the door keepers of the church, or the harvesters of the fields? In

one parable Jesus tells the disciples to let the weeds grow up with the grain and tells them that at the harvest they will be separated.

When Jesus broke the bread for the two Emmaus disciples, he did it despite the fact that they were walking away from Jerusalem, away from their faith. The bread was broken and offered to them not on the condition that they return, but because Jesus' offer is Open to everyone, it is unconditional, it is just the opposite of what we think it should be.

This is what John Wesley believed. He believed that the Eucharist, otherwise known as communion was a means of God's grace to his people. He believed that the table should be open for all who desire to flee the wrath to come, and desired to know more about the love of God. In fact he believed, as do I, that in receiving, some eyes may be opened to faith.

Now I must point out, that when the two disciples saw Jesus break the bread, their eyes were opened and they ran the seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples. Thus, while the table is open, we must also consider how we will respond when our eyes are opened.

So today as we come to celebrate this holy meal I would remind you that it doesn't matter where you are in your faith. It doesn't matter if you are walking away from Christ. We as United Methodists practice an open table, open to everyone. We do not make judgments about a person's worthiness, and we ask them not to judge themselves. We all come to this table in belief that it is Jesus Christ who presides. He does not turn away strings or ask them to become frayed knots. He treats us like he did the disciples on the road to Emmaus. And although we may be fools, and not understand, Jesus patiently teaches us, invites us to the table, breaks the bread for us, and offers it to us as a means of grace. Hopefully in the process, our eyes will be open to the greatness of God's love for us. Come, let us partake in the Open table. Amen.