

## Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day [, the day of Jesus' resurrection,] two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,<sup>14</sup> and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.<sup>15</sup> While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them,<sup>16</sup> but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.<sup>17</sup> And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad.<sup>18</sup> Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?'<sup>19</sup> He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,<sup>20</sup> and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.<sup>21</sup> But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning,<sup>23</sup> and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.<sup>24</sup> Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.'<sup>25</sup> Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!<sup>26</sup> Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?'<sup>27</sup> Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.<sup>28</sup> As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on.<sup>29</sup> But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.'<sup>30</sup> So he went in to stay with them.<sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

### *Making Toast Sticks*

**A sermon preached by**  
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Luke 24:13-35

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<sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup>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?’ <sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ <sup>35</sup>Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.



“Come for toast sticks, Freddy?,” Mama Bell would ask the 5 year old little boy who would find his way to her back steps at a strategic time most afternoons. The back steps led directly to Mama Bell’s kitchen, and Freddy knew it. She was the age of his grandmother yet despite the age difference they became, not just neighbors, but friends.

One afternoon, this neighbor who everyone called “Mama” Bell asked Freddy if he wanted to make the afternoon’s toast sticks on his own. The grownup task caused his pride to swell. She showed him how to put the slices of bread in the toaster, she allowed him to butter the toast once it popped up, and then she showed him how to spread a drop of jam on each slice. She even let him carefully cut each toast slice into the four narrow strips that made them “sticks.”

From that day on, Freddy was confident that he could make his own toast sticks. His neighbor – his *friend* – had showed him how. She had taken the time to teach her young friend a lesson he would keep in his head and heart forever. Very soon after that afternoon’s lesson, Mama Bell died. But Freddy knew how to make toast sticks.

More than six decades later, Fred Rogers recounted that story to another friend shortly before he died in 2003. Mister Rogers wondered if the elderly Mama Bell, who was perhaps his first

model for who a neighbor is, had somehow known that she was, as he said, “reaching toward heaven and wanted him to have this experience as a comfort to him, as a reminder of their unique friendship.”

“I thought about Fred and Mama Bell again when I returned home from his memorial service in Pittsburgh,” writes Amy Hollingsworth in *The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers*, “Reflecting on our [nearly 10 year] relationship, I realized that Fred had entrusted me with something very similar to the gift Mama Bell had entrusted to him; he left me with something while he was reaching toward heaven that I wasn’t even aware of (although I had a sense that he was). For years – through our letters, our conversations, and our prayers for one another – Fred had left me with ‘spiritual toast sticks,’ a legacy that would comfort me long after he was gone ... Now that I had them, I could enjoy them on my own, even when he was no longer here.”

Those words jumped off the page at me as I read them. Isn’t that what Jesus was about during the brief period of time he was physically with us on this earth? Wasn’t that what he was trying to do with his disciples during his last few days with them – teaching them how to make toast sticks on their own so they would be comforted once he was gone?

For those of us who follow a lectionary sequence of reading through the Bible, this Sunday each year, just two weeks after Easter Sunday, we encounter the Risen Jesus trying to leave his disciples – us – with not only comforting words but with an action that we can remember long after he is gone. He teaches us how to figuratively make toast sticks now that he is gone.

In Year B we read of Jesus appearing to his disciples while they are hearing from the two Emmaus disciples. Jesus asks for something to eat. “They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and

the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.” (Luke 24: 36b-53) He then leads them to Bethany and they experience his ascension to heaven.

In Year C we find the Risen Christ in John’s Gospel at the Sea of Tiberias where Simon Peter and six other disciples have returned to a life of sustenance fishing. “Just after daybreak, [the Risen] Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, ‘Children, you have no fish, have you?’ They answered him, ‘No.’ He said to them, ‘Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’ So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.” (John 21: 1-25) On the beach, he eats breakfast with them and asks Simon Peter three times, “Do you love me?”.

In Year A in our lectionary readings – this year – two disciples encounter Jesus on the road to Emmaus where he walks with them and teaches them until they get to their destination in the evening – and “when he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.” (Luke 24: 13-35)

Each year just after the Resurrection story has filled us with celebration and joy we are reminded that what we learned from Jesus was to be a comfort to us in his absence and something for us to pass on to those who come after us. And each year we share on this Sunday a story of food – the sharing of bread – sharing of the sustenance that keeps us alive.

In each post-Resurrection story we are entrusted with food to nourish our bodies – broken bread at the Emmaus table, broiled fish with the disciples in hiding, a beach breakfast with faithful followers. In each post-Resurrection story we are entrusted with spiritual food to nourish our souls – “were not our hearts burning within us” on the Emmaus Road, “Simon, son of John, do you love me? ... Feed my lambs,” at the beach, and “I am sending upon you

what [God] promised; ... you have been clothed with power from on high” as we stand in awe at Bethany.

We have been entrusted with the power to share who and what Jesus was and is. We have heard from the one whom God used to overcome death that we must live and teach what God has shared with us. We can now make our own toast sticks and we must show others how as well. Fred Rogers knew and lived and taught that Jesus message clearly. He took the advice of St. Francis of Assisi who is credited with the line, “Preach the gospel at all times; when necessary use words.”

During one of his *Neighborhood* episodes, Mister Rogers was teaching about sharing, as he often did. He held a fig bar up to the camera and said, “I wish I could break this in two and share it with you.” Later, when Amy Hollingsworth was interviewing him for her book, he said to her about that episode, “it just dawned on me – that was very much like the Eucharist, how [food] could be broken and offered to nourish others. And yet there was no way I could put that food through the television set, so I said there are other ways of sharing.”

So the question of this post-Resurrection time in which we find ourselves – not just these weeks after our Easter celebration, but these centuries after we know of Jesus death and are positive of his presence with us even now – the question is, “How have we used what we have learned to teach others whom we have encountered?” You’ve been taught how to make toast sticks. Now go teach others.

Jesus is not physically here. Thomas had a difficult time accepting the fact of his resurrection without proof. Cleopas and friend had a difficult time recognizing their teacher along the Emmaus road. I suspect that we have our doubts about what to teach. How do we share with others a story about a man who died two millennia ago, whose presence was so powerful that his friends experienced him as being alive again, and now for these 2,000 years people haven’t been able to stop talking about him?

That's the Jesus story – the story we need to be able to tell without having seen it happen.

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back. The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, where they had been on vacation.

Every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window. The man in the other bed began to live for those one-hour periods, where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside. The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake.

Ducks and swans played on the water, while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance. As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene. One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man couldn't hear the band, he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words.

Days and weeks passed. One morning, the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths, only to find the lifeless body of the man by the window, who had died peacefully in his sleep. She was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone.

Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it for himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed. It faced a blank wall. The man asked the nurse what could have compelled his deceased roommate who had described such wonderful things outside this window. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the wall.

We need to be able to teach the Jesus message – the Jesus story – with such clarity and intensity so that even though we can't see what we're describing, those who hear us can see it and learn it and live it. We have learned to make toast sticks for ourselves – now we must teach others.

I say this to those here today with infants and toddlers in their lives – parents and grandparents and great-grandparents. I say it to everyone here today who is a teacher – by profession or by avocation or simply by necessity. I say it to anyone of us who has something to share with the generations which follow us – which means I say this to *all* of us.

*It is up to us to teach those who come after us the essential message of the One who brings us here this morning, the One who we recognize through the breaking of bread and sharing at table, the One who calls us to the waters of baptism.*

That message is about peace that passes understanding, about love of self and neighbor and God, about the difference between the empires of the world and the empire of God, about the defiant symbol of the cross in a world that believes death is the end of life. The message given to us which we pass on to those around us is about forgiveness and compassion, about reconciliation and passion, about imperfection and acceptance.

The message is one of blessing and sacrifice and abundance, poverty and wealth and sin. The message is found in breaking bread, sharing a meal, washing clean all that clouds our relationship with God.

Poet Oriah Mountain Dreamer puts it this way as she reminds us of experiencing and living and passing along what nourishes our spirit (excerpted from *The Dance*):

I have sent you my invitation,  
the note inscribed on the palm of my hand  
by the fire of living.  
Don't jump up and shout, "Yes, this is what I want!  
Let's do it!"  
Just stand up and dance with me.

...

Don't tell me you want to hold the whole world  
in your heart.  
Show me how you turn away  
from making another wrong without  
abandoning yourself when you are hurt  
and afraid of being unloved.

Tell me a story of who you are,  
and see who I am in the stories I am living.  
And together we will remember  
that each of us always has a choice.

Don't tell me how wonderful things will be  
. . . someday.

Show me you can risk being completely at peace,  
truly okay with the way things are  
right now in this moment,  
and again in the next and the next and the next  
...

I have heard enough warrior stories of heroic daring.  
Tell me how you crumble when you hit the wall,  
The place you cannot go beyond

by the strength of your own will.  
What carries you to the other side of that wall,  
to the fragile beauty of your own humanness?

And after we have shown each other  
how we have set and kept the  
clear, healthy boundaries that help us live  
side by side with each other,  
let us risk remembering that we never stop loving  
those we once loved out loud.

....

Show me how you offer to your people and the world  
the stories and the songs you want  
our children's children to remember,  
and I will show you how I struggle,  
not to change the world, but to love it.

...

Don't say, "Yes!"  
Just take my hand and dance with me.

Take from here today the making of toast sticks as it has been given to us – be comforted that though the maker is no longer here you now know how to make them yourself, be aware that it is your responsibility to now pass that on to those who follow, and in the making of your spiritual toast sticks experience again all that Jesus revealed to us before and reveals to us each time we journey toward Emmaus or wherever the road takes us next.

"When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it" – showed them how to make toast sticks – "and gave it to them."

Go and do likewise.

Amen.