

Easter 3 Sermon
The Rev. Megan Dembi

On Maundy Thursday we celebrate the last supper, the last dinner and Passover meal which Christ shared with the Apostles. This must have been an especially emotional event for the disciples. By the time they had gathered for this meal, all of the disciples knew Jesus was going to die—Jesus had not only told the disciples this himself, but the religious authorities were closing in on Jesus, so it was only a matter of time until they would catch up with him. That night they also learned from Christ that he was betrayed by one of his own disciples. One of the people whom Jesus trusted the most was to be the one to hand him over to be killed. In addition, Jesus had told Peter, the rock on which the church would be built, that he would deny Jesus. For all of these reasons this last supper would have been a very memorable moment in the lives of the disciples—it was the last meal they shared with Christ—it is where they learned that even those closest to Jesus were capable of betraying and abandoning him. But perhaps more importantly, it was also when Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment—a commandment that Christians throughout the world follow to this day. “On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to God, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.’ This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me.” This commandment was powerful, because through it the disciples were assured of the promises Christ had made—that by his own body and blood Christ would win for them forgiveness of sins and open to them the way of everlasting life.

So perhaps it is no surprise that it is under similar circumstances that the disciples come to recognize Jesus once again after the resurrection. We are told that Christ appears to the disciples many times after he is raised from the dead, and yet they seem to have trouble identifying him when he does. In last week’s Gospel, the disciples did not recognize Jesus until he showed them the marks of the nails in his hands and the wound in his side. On Easter, Mary Magdalene confused Jesus with the gardener, until he called her by name. Yet why is this? Why is it that Jesus’ closest friends and followers are unable to see Jesus for who he is after the resurrection? Paul talks about what the resurrected body is like—how unlike our mortal bodies it is incorruptible, imperishable, and immortal. The body that we will be raised in in the resurrection will be somehow unlike the bodies we have now. And we see this when we look to the example of Christ. In his resurrected body, Christ can be touched, he has physical form—he can eat and drink and speak. Yet his body does not look exactly like his mortal body. Though it is not completely different—it still shows the marks of the crucifixion—he is not immediately recognizable to those who know him. Christ’s resurrected body also seems to have fewer limitations than his mortal body. Though last week the disciples were hiding in a locked house, Jesus was somehow able to enter into it in spite of that physical obstacle. In today’s Gospel, he is able to simply vanish right in front of the disciples’ eyes. In his resurrected body, Christ seems to be able to walk through walls or disappear and reappear at will.

Yet in spite of the fact that Jesus’ resurrected body is so different than his mortal one, his disciples do come to recognize him, though initially they were as clueless as Mary at the tomb. As they are traveling to Emmaus, discussing Jesus’ condemnation, crucifixion, and possible resurrection, the resurrected Christ appears to the disciples. But when Jesus comes up to them and asks them what they are talking about, the disciples are completely out of the loop. They begin to tell the very person who experienced these events how these things took place. And ironically, they seem to doubt that Christ had indeed been resurrected, as the women disciples had told them. And Jesus, as he had many a time before, explained to them how the messiah would go about the salvation of the world. The disciples invite this person whom they think is a stranger to dinner, and it is here that they finally see Christ for

who he is. Just as he had done at the last supper, Christ takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to the disciples. And it is through this act, these words and motions which are so reminiscent of what their Lord had commanded them to do on Maundy Thursday, that the disciples' eyes are opened and they recognize Christ. But no sooner had they realized the man they had been speaking to was Christ that he vanished from their sight. Now they finally came to believe the witness of the women at the tomb—Christ had risen indeed, and he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

And though our own experience may feel less dramatic and may not involve any cases of mistaken identity, we too come to know Jesus in this way. Through sharing together in the breaking of bread and drinking of wine, in partaking in the blessed body and blood of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, we come to know him—and we become a part of him and of one another—one body. And we are reminded of the promises Christ has made to us—of the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life Christ won for us through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. It is this promise that the faithful since the time of Christ have been baptized into. And through these promises “we know that we were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from our ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for our sake. Through him we have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that our faith and hope are set on God.” It is true that we ourselves did not know Christ in his mortal nor his resurrected flesh as the disciples did. But just as the disciples did on Maundy Thursday, we came to learn of Christ's betrayal and abandonment, and the plan for the salvation of the world in which Christ would sacrifice himself. Just as the disciples did after Christ's resurrection, we have learned that Christ's promise of resurrected life has been displayed through his own resurrection, and that in partaking in the bread and wine of the Eucharist we can more fully know Christ and live into his promise of salvation. May Christ who makes himself known to us in the breaking of the bread, open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work. Amen