

Breaking Bread

by Rev Dan Balsdon, Sunday 26th April 2020

watch or read online at www.revdanbalsdon.com

In Luke's gospel, after Jesus resurrection, we find the story of Cleopas and his travelling companion on the Emmaus road. I shared a reflection on the passage in [last week's Sunday reflections](#).

Cleopas and his companion are filled with grief and uncertainty after Jesus' death and then a stranger joins them on their journey. And they hadn't any clue who this stranger was.

"As they came near the village to which they were going, [the stranger] walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. 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 24:28-31

What I have found striking reading this over the last week is that it is in the breaking and sharing of bread that the true identity of Jesus is realised. As they sit together, in fellowship with one another, learning and discerning and questioning, eating and drinking, the bread is broken and Jesus is seen for who he is.

Breaking of bread is one of the many titles in Christian tradition we use for communion, Eucharist, the Lord's supper. This week the Emmaus story has set me thinking about communion.

This is my home communion set. It was given to me by my placement church while I was training, a multi-cultural congregation in a deprived and diverse suburb of Birmingham. This reminds me of where I've come from, and how I'm part of the national and global church.



I use this set to take communion to people who are housebound. So it reminds me both of the local churches which I serve, but also of the homes to which I have visited and shared communion.

This set reminds me that the presence of God is everywhere; global, national, local and in our homes.

Communion is something may be important to our spirituality as individuals and as worshipping communities.¹ It is a meal we share, through which we remember Jesus sharing a meal with his friends before his arrest and crucifixion. We take bread and wine, symbols of the body and blood of Christ, we bless them, break them and share them as we remember Christ and experience him present with us now.² Where we are embraced by the unconditional love and unending grace of God, offered through Christ, made present by God's Spirit.

¹ See *Share this Feast*, Reflecting on Holy Communion, (Methodist Publishing, 2018), p6

² See *Share this Feast*, Reflecting on Holy Communion, (Methodist Publishing, 2018), p4

But for the moment, the plate and cup are empty. We're not sharing communion together. We are distanced from one another, unable to physically gather and share as a worshipping community.

At the moment, some churches have been practicing communion online, but as British Methodists, we are not. In 2018 our Methodist Conference considered virtual communion, albeit considered under very different circumstances to that which we find ourselves in today. Conference voted against the practice, and while given current circumstances I suspect the conversation and decision might go differently, for now we follow those decisions, leaving plate and cup empty, waiting for the day they can be filled again.

For me, I want to be honest with you, I've come to a point where I'm ok with that. It's painful, not being able to share communion with those I know dearly wish to receive it. It's painful not the able to gather at the table to share as a worshipping community.

Some of you may share my feeling ok, but I expect that for some of you, not receiving communion has been, or is continuing to be difficult right now. I want you to know I understand something of that struggle. But I also want to share with you a little bit about why, for me, I've come to a place where I feel ok for the moment, that the glasses and plate are empty and waiting, as I patiently wait for the time they can be filled again.

And in sharing, I hope that it may help you too.

Filled

At the beginning of this year, many Methodists prayed the covenant prayer, as a sign and renewing of our continuing commitment to living in relationship with God, knowing that God continues to be unconditionally committed to us by his love and grace.

Within the covenant prayer we say the words: *'let me be full, let me be empty,'*³

I've found reflecting on those words in light of not receiving communion during this time helpful. The covenant prayer contrasts various ways of living, employed or laid aside, having all things or nothing, being full or being empty.

But whether employed or laid aside, having all things or nothing, full or empty, are all included as part of our living in relationship with God. There is never an absence of God.

For me, these words remind me that whether I have received communion or not, all of life is saturated in God, God is still present and part of my life and being. So I've felt God helping Me to this time, not as a case of communion being taken away from me, but a time where I consciously abstain, as part of my being emptied for God.

Yet, at the same time, I also see the empty plate and cup being just as presence filled by God's Spirit as when they are filled with bread and wine.

³ Part of the Covenant Prayer, Methodist Worship Book, p290

Inclusion and exclusion

For me, another reason that I feel ok that we leave plate and cup empty is that, if did communion online, what about those who are offline? Who do not have internet access?

before lockdown, when communion was celebrated in our buildings there was inclusive intent within our liturgy and practice, and those that were housebound had the options of home or extended communion.

But today, those who would be excluded from online communion have no other way of receiving.

As part of communion we often share the peace, sometimes preluded by the words:

***'In the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body.
Let us therefore keep the unity of Spirit in the bond of peace.'*⁴**

For me, if I was able to share communion with some of you, I wonder if I would then risk breaking that unity of Spirit and bond of peace, through depriving and excluding some, from what I was offering to others.

To bring us back to Emmaus, in that resurrection story, as Cleopas and his companion offered hospitality to a stranger, it was in the distribution, the breaking and sharing, Jesus was made known.⁵

This Emmaus encounter is not communion as we may have come to practice it. Here is a simple meal and a household who share hospitality with a stranger. In that act of sharing what they had, their guest shares with them everything he is.

We can only gather as households right now, but I can assure you that even though plate and cup are empty, Jesus is present with us, not a stranger but a friend, longing to be a guest at our tables.

It may not be how we're used to it through communion, we still patiently wait for a time that we can once again physically gather together to worship and break bread together, but even while cup and plate are empty, if we allow our eyes to be opened to it;

**God's Spirit, the very presence of God, continues to bind us together;
though distanced, we are united – one in Spirit.**

**God's unconditional love and unending grace
are overflowing for us as much now as they always have.**

**And whether we feel full or empty,
Christ in his fullness is forever with us.**

May the peace of the Risen Christ be with you.

Rev Dan

⁴ Example of the Introduction to the peace, Methodist Worship Book, p189.

⁵ I must give some credit to a friend who sowed this seed in their blog post earlier this week - <https://dbobstoner.com/jesus-on-a-boriswalk/>