

Wesley United Methodist Church

May 4, 2014

"I Smell Bread."

Luke 24:13-35

How many of you remember the popular sitcom called MASH? If you do, then you recall that it was about a group of doctors and nurses trying to make sense of their assignment to the 4077 Mash unit during the Korean War. In one particular episode, Major Winchester, who often protects himself from the horror of suffering and death around him, finally breaks and is left defenseless. He slips into a depression and struggles to find some answers to life's most perplexing problem...death. Finally, in utter desperation, he leaves the base hospital and goes to the battalion aid station where the wounded are first taken from the lines of battle. Colonel Potter discovers his whereabouts and calls him, ordering him to return to the MASH unit. However, a medical corpsman intercepts the conversation and calls the surgeon over to a man who is dying. Winchester confirms the impending death with a glance.

Obviously in pain, the soldier cries out, "I can't see anything. Hold my hand." The Major grabs his hand and the soldier whispers, "I'm dying."

The Major, still trying to find answers, is asking, "Can you see anything? Can you feel anything? I have to know." But the dying soldier doesn't answer any of those questions. Instead, all he manages is, "I smell bread."

Isn't that odd? What the Major wants are answers to all the pain, all the tragedy, and suffering around him. And all he gets, instead of answers, is a fragrance, a symbol, an image, an experience. "I smell bread."

Well, I have to tell you that at times I felt like Major Winchester, overwhelmed by all the suffering and pain around us. I have to admit, that I, too, have longed for answers. In fact there have been a number of times in the last months, after seeing the tragedies on the disappearance of Flight MH 370... the ferry accident in the South Korean Sea... watching the footage of the latest senseless murder...meeting a woman in a nursing home who is dying without the companionship of family and friends...there have been a number of times in the last weeks when I wanted to raise my voice once again to heaven pleading for an explanation. I wanted to know why yet another one of our daughters has been diagnosed with cancer. I wanted to know why it happens, and I wanted to know how to stop it.

I turned to the Scripture thumbing through for some help. Then, when I looked at my worship schedule, I realized it was Communion Sunday. It was then that I realized that I might not get all the answers I long for, but what I did get...was the smell of bread.

I, too, got a fragrance, an image, a symbol. What I got was the smell of bread. And surprisingly, I'm not the first to have such an experience. For in today's text, two disciples are walking along on Easter evening rehearsing the tragic events of the last few days. They are talking and discussing the betrayal of Christ, the suffering of Christ, the crucifixion of Christ as well as the perplexing resurrection of Christ. And suddenly a stranger joins them on the road, asking what they are talking about.

"Are you the only one in Jerusalem who doesn't know what's been happening?" one says. Then he proceeds to share their story, their disappointment, their confusion and grief. And to their story, Jesus immediately enlightens them from Scriptures, interpreting himself to them. Then when they came near the village to which they were going, he started to walk away. But they urged him to stay with them, even invited him to their table. There, he took bread, blessed and broke it, giving it to them. And it was at that moment...as the aroma of bread filled the house where they were staying, that they recognized this stranger as the Risen Christ.

It was at that moment and none other that these two disciples recognized this stranger as the Risen Christ. They said to each other, as if kicking themselves for not recognizing him sooner, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road while he was opening the Scripture to us?"

And yet, even when he listened to the depth of their disappointment and grief...even when he interpreted the Scriptures to them, they still didn't recognize him. I don't know about you, but that makes me a little nervous. If Jesus himself couldn't reveal the truth to them through his interpreting...his enlightening...his explaining...if Jesus himself couldn't answer their questions to their satisfaction, I'm in big trouble.

And the bad news is that we're not told exactly why they didn't get it. I can speculate, for sometimes our grief is so great that we need more. Sometimes we need more than someone listen to us, as important as that is. Sometimes we need more than enlightenment...interpretation...explanation...as important as that is. The truth is, sometimes our grief is so great that we need more.

What we need...even more than answers, is an experience. We need an experience of the Living, Risen Christ. What we need is some tangible evidence that God knows what we're up against...that God knows the depth of human suffering, and not only knows it or knows about it, but has experienced first hand. What we need is an experience of the Risen Christ so that we can believe again that in all things...ALL THINGS...in tragedy, suffering, even death. God still works together for good for those who love God and are called according to divine purposes (Romans 8).

What we need, friends, is the smell...the feel...the taste of bread because this is the Bread of Life, and when we share it, we relive what deep down we know is true. Jesus grieved our pain. He suffered our loss. He endured our shame. He died our death. He was broken...broken by the selfishness and sinfulness of the world, but rose again. And now, through the power of resurrecting love, he lives again, to walk with us again, to listen to us always, to enlighten us and to reveal himself to us in the breaking and sharing of bread.

I suspect that's why you came here today, isn't it? Searching for answers to our questions...what we really need is an experience, an experience of the Risen Christ. Well, I've got good news!!! I smell bread.