

2020 04 26 – In the Breaking of the Bread

Luke 24:13-35

One week ago today, twenty-two people were murdered and three injured by a lone gunman in Nova Scotia. During these past seven days the details of this tragic event have gradually become known to the RCMP and to the public. The people of Nova Scotia and of this country are reeling with pain; our hearts are broken; our trust has been betrayed. One United Church leader from Nova Scotia wrote, “we’ve also lost a way of life.” <https://broadview.org/nova-scotia-shooting-community/>

During this week we have been invited to take part in online vigils, acts of solidarity and opportunities for lament. On Wednesday some of the members of our bible study group watched as United Church clergy in Nova Scotia led an online vigil that was attended by over 1600 members of our denomination. At the end of that vigil the worship leader read a blessing by Jan Richardson. It is called *Blessing for the Brokenhearted* and it begins:

Let us agree
for now
that we will not say
the breaking
makes us stronger
or that it is better
to have this pain
than to have done
without this love.

Let us promise
we will not
tell ourselves
time will heal
the wound,

when every day
our waking
opens it anew.

Perhaps for now
it can be enough
to simply marvel
at the mystery
of how a heart
so broken
can go on beating,

<https://paintedprayerbook.com/2014/02/10/a-blessing-for-the-brokenhearted/>

Like the people of Nova Scotia, those two disciples on the road to Emmaus were broken-hearted. Their friend, their leader – the one that they had hoped was the Messiah, the one that they had hoped would set Israel free – was dead. He had been crucified on Friday, and it was now late on Sunday afternoon. Sure, the women had returned from the empty tomb with a crazy story about angels and Jesus alive, but how could they believe such an astonishing tale? Their hearts had been broken open, their hope was gone.

We all know what it is to be broken-hearted, to have loved and lost, to have hoped and been disappointed, to have trusted and been betrayed. At this time in history, our world is filled with broken-hearted people:

- those who knew and loved the 22 people murdered in Nova Scotia;
- the families and friends of the over 200,000 people who have died from COVID-19;
- all of us who are practicing physical distancing and haven't seen our families and friends for weeks;
- many of us who are watching our businesses fail or our plans for the future unravel.

Whether we admit it or not we are immersed in grief, in disappointment, in uncertainty and in fear. There is a brokenness in us and amongst us that cannot be ignored.

In this time of broken hearts, it is OK to say, "I'm sad." In this time of isolation, it is OK to say, "I miss my family." In this time of distancing, it is OK to say, "I really need a hug." In this time of COVID-19, it is OK to admit, "I'm scared." In this time of loss, it is really OK to cry. So far in this pandemic, no one in my sphere of knowing has died, and yet in the last couple of weeks my heart has been so filled with grief that on more than one occasion it has spilled over and I have allowed myself to weep. It is good to cry; we know that even Jesus wept.

The disciples travelling to Emmaus were also visibly sad. They didn't try to hide their brokenness from the stranger they met on the road. In fact, they shared the whole tragic story with him: their loss, their grief, their fear, and their shattered dreams. The stranger listened and then he shared stories from their Hebrew scriptures. He shared the wisdom of their prophets. He tried to assure them that Jesus really was the Messiah. The disciples were so intrigued with this learned man, this stranger, that they invited him home for the night.

I'm going to invite us now to go back to Jan Richardson's *Blessing for the Brokenhearted*. We will start part way through:

Perhaps for now
it can be enough
to simply marvel

at the mystery
of how a heart
so broken
can go on beating,
as if it were made
for precisely this—

as if it knows
the only cure for love
is more of it,

as if it sees
the heart's sole remedy
for breaking
is to love still,

as if it trusts
that its own
persistent pulse
is the rhythm
of a blessing
we cannot
begin to fathom
but will save us
nonetheless.

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So often when we are in the midst of our brokenness, it is impossible for us to see beyond our pain and our suffering. It is impossible for us to believe that there could be healing or new life. Sometimes, in the midst of our brokenness all we can feel is the sorrow and the loneliness. And that's OK.

In that time it is “enough to simply marvel at the mystery of how a heart so broken can go on beating.” It is enough to trust, to trust “ a blessing we cannot begin to fathom but will save us nonetheless.” What an incredible description of the mysterious power of Love, Divine Love, the Love that we know as God, as the Holy Mystery, as the Risen Christ – “a blessing we cannot begin to fathom but will save us nonetheless.”

It wasn't until the disciples were sitting down to a meal and watched as the Risen Christ took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them that their eyes were opened and they knew him. He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. Jesus had been there all along and they hadn't recognized him. The Risen Christ had been with them, listening to them, comforting them and they weren't even aware.

The Risen Christ is with us too. The Risen Christ is with us in our suffering, in our brokenness, even when we don't recognize the presence of the Essence of Love. Often we don't know the Holy Mystery was there until afterwards, until after the bread is broken, until after that Love connection has disappeared. For now, in the midst of this pandemic, in the wake of the tragic events in Nova Scotia, let us trust in a “blessing we cannot begin to fathom. Let us trust in the beating of our hearts, in the gift of life itself, in the promise of our breath.