

If I say "What symbol represents McDonalds," you might say, "Golden Arches." You remember that symbol from their logo or ads or perhaps an early drive-in restaurant. If you're driving along the interstate looking for fast food or a clean restroom and you spot the Golden Arches on a sign, you recognize instantly that McDonalds is nearby. That symbol, by the way, is universally recognized even more than the Red Cross or the American flag. McDonalds spends more than any other advertiser to make sure its symbol is remembered as well as recognized. There is a difference between "remembered" and "recognized." It's significant in the climax of our gospel text. Luke reports, "and they recognized him." The gospel doesn't say "they remembered him." The word "recognize" means to connect present perception with some concept already known. To recognize something is to relate a past remembrance to a new perception of it. "I recognized right away that this was no good." By contrast, to remember is to bring something to mind that you've already learned or perceived. A remembrance may or may not have a connection to the situation at hand. If the disciples at table with their companion had simply "remembered," and not recognized Jesus, they would have been recalling something without relating it to his breaking bread. That Cleopas and his partner "recognize" Jesus in the breaking of bread is a powerful realization that resurrection has indeed occurred.

Let's imagine what it must have been like for one of these disciples on the road to Emmaus – the one unnamed – to recognize the Lord as risen. "I was one of those followers who recognized late-in-the-game that Jesus was the promised Messiah. That is, I believed that Jesus was sent by God to liberate our nation from our Roman occupiers. But the cross put an end to that hope. My grief at losing a friend and teacher was tinged with letdown at losing a liberator. Had I placed my hopes on the wrong person? "I've tried to reconstruct the events leading up to the horrible day of his death. Were there clues that could have prepared us? I tried hard, but I really couldn't remember the events that were happening around Jesus, only the Teacher himself. "Everyone I talked with seemed to have a different interpretation of his death. I got restless and suggested to Cleopas that the best thing would be to get out of town. It wasn't safe to be there and it wasn't comforting. Our walk to Emmaus was in the afternoon of the third day after Jesus' crucifixion. Each step away from Jerusalem softened the pain. For the first mile or so, Cleopas and I hardly said a word. "I was in a fog. So many unanswered questions! Were the women who went to the tomb right? Did they really meet two angels? Did I dare believe their claim that Jesus was risen? Peter went back to Jesus' tomb to verify, but all that proved was that the corpse was gone. Peter didn't know what to make of it. "As Cleopas and I trudged toward Emmaus, we started to disclose some of our private wonderings.

Cleopas was trying to take the long view of things, starting with the rebuilding of the Temple in our grandfathers' day. 'God is with us,' he was saying, 'I'm sure of it.' "I pointed out that even in the longer view, things have not been working out too well for the nation of Israel. 'We've not had a real prophet since Zechariah.' We batted questions and comments back and forth, getting more and more animated. Then He came. He closed in on us from behind. We had not passed anyone on the way, nor crossed any other roads. So we were surprised. "He seemed to be matching our stride so we allowed him to walk between us. He asked what we were talking about. Cleopas responded a little sarcastically, I suppose, because the stranger seemed to be unaware of the calamity we were going through. We didn't hide our pain, but shared it openly, letting our vulnerability show. 'You're being foolish, and dimwitted to boot,' our companion retorted. 'Messiah had to suffer!' "We were incredulous and not a little offended. The stranger took the lead in our conversation. The miles wore on as he explicated Messiah in the law and the prophets. He started with the first Passover, emphasizing the unleavened bread so much a part of that tradition. But I couldn't recognize anything like our grief in all that ancient history and prophecy. Nor could I recall with any detail the circumstances that led to our Lord's death on a cross.

Approaching the inn where we would spend the night, we begged our companion to remain with us and tell us more. Which to our relief he agreed to. "As we sat down to a simple meal, our companion, a total stranger only hours ago, looked at me with sympathetic eyes and said, "If you can't recall, then recognize." Then he took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave us each a portion. Memory triggered by the smell of fresh bread, we recognized the same gestures, the same tone of voice, the same emotion that Jesus showed in our meals with him. And we knew we were in our Lord's company. We blinked back tears and suddenly he was gone. But somehow, we knew, he was still with us. "Reaching a hand to one another, we both knew the truth: Jesus lives on. A day that started in deep pain ended in elation. Our vulnerability on the road opened us to a profound encounter with the Lord himself. We couldn't wait until morning to return to Jerusalem and tell the others how Jesus had disclosed himself."

All Christians walk an Emmaus Road at times. We walk to Emmaus not to escape from pain, but to recognize that pain is normal, and to recognize that Christ walks the road with us. We search for answers to give meaning to something like a flood, or a death, or loss of a job. The walk to Emmaus takes on special urgency when something or someone we have loved or deeply believed in vanishes unexpectedly. Why, God? Why? What we need before we get answers, though, is the courage to be totally honest with God.

We are hurt, frustrated, hopeless, or angry.
 Sadly, too often we have been taught
 not to express frustration or doubt to God.
 But being honest and vulnerable is necessary
 to lasting intimacy with anyone, including God.
 People who spare God their anger and doubt
 miss an opportunity to grow in their faith.
 Christ offers us his own hands and feet
 pierced for us
 and his own blood shed in love for us.
 Why would we withhold our own pain from him?

Scientists who study memory have long known
 that remembrance is not as strong as recognition.
 For example, if you ask me the French word
 for "school," I might *remember* that it is "ecole."
 But suppose I am in Quebec
 and approach a building with the word *ecole*
 inscribed over the door.

I search my memory more aggressively,
 retrieve the meaning more quickly,
 and retain the meaning of *ecole* longer
 than if I just learned the word by rote memory.
 Recognition is more powerful than remembrance.
 Let's take a more relevant example: bread.
 If we try to bring up a memory of "bread,"
 it is probably some generic image or experience.
 Even if I try to recall metaphorical uses of bread,
 such as "I am the bread of the world,"
 I have only a vague picture.
 But when we break bread in the Lord's Supper
 and we receive a physical piece of bread,
 we recognize it because of its physical properties –
 its taste, texture, smell, chewiness or crispness.
 And then we recall its nutritional value,
 its history, its commonality with all cultures.
 And the combination of recognition and recall
 gives the bread great significance.

At the Lord's table, our eyes are opened
 and our spirits are unbound.
 We partake the bread "in remembrance of Christ."
 But it's also "in recognition" of him.
 Celebrating the Lord's Supper again and again
 is like rehearsing for the Great Banquet in heaven.
 Participating in the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving
 we recall the mighty acts of God in Christ.
 Then we ingest Christ's spirit into our very bodies.
 The word "companion" literally means
 "with bread."

In the bread, we renew a relationship
 with Christ, our companion in life and death.
 Encounters with sacred mystery are fleeting,
 but we recognize when they occur.
 This is part of what we mean by atonement –
 at-one-ment with the Divine.
 Direct encounter with a mystery is disorienting.
 We may be moved to turn in a new direction.
 We may even have a conversion experience.
 Or, we may feel a period of disorientation or fog.
 However we react to the mystery of resurrection,
 we are changed.
 In breaking bread together,
 we recognize each other's humanity.

CONCLUSION

Pastor Haydn McLean likes to tell of the
 Christian couple who had a trademark way
 of saying grace when dining out with friends.
 The host would simply take a roll from the basket,
 break it open, and say,
 "It is good to break bread with friends."
 The two disciples recognized the risen Jesus
 in the context of hospitality and table fellowship.
 When we break bread with the lonely and rejected,
 with the struggling and earth-bound,
 we recognize in them the risen Jesus.

It is one thing to remember Jesus Christ of scripture.

Let us recognize the presence of the *living* Christ
in places we have never looked before.

I close with "A Collect for the Presence of Christ"
which first appeared

in the American Book of Prayer:

Lord Jesus, stay with us,

for evening is at hand and day is past.

Be our companion in the way,

kindle our hearts, and awaken hope,

that we may know you

as you are revealed in Scripture

and the breaking of bread.

Grant this for the sake of your love.

Amen.