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## Sleeping with Bread<sup>1</sup>

Homily by Lisa Wiens Heinsohn given for the people of St. John's Episcopal Church  
The Third Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2020: Luke 24:13-35

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!  
The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!

I so miss seeing you all in person. Though I must say, it is wonderful to see so many of you over Zoom. We are doing daily prayer. We are doing zoom sermon discussions and zoom coffee hours. I see many of you for one on one conversations about many things. I suspect some of you have jobs that also keep you on Zoom many hours every day. Some of you have been just trying to figure out how to parent your child through school and how to keep working from home at the same time. Some of you have lost income and are afraid or even hungry. Some of you are living alone and feeling really lonely. Even the introverts. Some of you have continued to go to work because you have to or you are called to. You are nurses and grocery store workers and building maintenance folks and doctors and bank loan officers on the front line. Some of you are devouring the news with dismay everywhere you turn. I have heard what many of you are experiencing. I know what I myself am experiencing. Through all of this I want to begin by saying something. Whatever you actually feel, however well or poorly you are coping, however strong or fragile or confident or ashamed you feel, and whatever your health and economic situation:

God is with us.

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<sup>1</sup> This title is borrowed from a book by Matthew, Dennis & Sheila Linn called *Sleeping With Bread*, which is mentioned in this homily.

And God is kind.

Today's gospel reading is from Luke, the story of when the risen Christ appears to two of his disciples, not two of the twelve apostles but two others, on the road to Emmaus. This first appearance of Jesus is meant to begin to show us what it means when we say that the love of God is stronger than sin or violence or death.

And what I see in this Jesus is that he accompanies the disciples through all the stages of their grief, inability to understand, and isolation. I see that he is first of all kind, and he is patient. I hope you will take some time today to sit with this story and take it in slowly, like you are savoring a gourmet meal. Jesus first meets them and even though he knows first hand what has happened, because he himself is the center of the story, he asks them what they are sad about. He listens to their experience. Then he begins to show them how what has happened is in every way part of the unfolding story of the love of God revealed in scripture. Their hearts begin to burn within them, and I've wondered about that. I am imagining they were experiencing the first kindling of an utterly unanticipated hope, a hope they had thought was impossible. It was the first glimmer of recognition that had not yet become conscious. Jesus was their Beloved. And their hearts knew him before their minds did.

What finally opened their eyes was when they took the risk to invite Jesus to continue with them, and offered him their hospitality. When he sat down and ate with them, and broke the bread with them, they realized who he was. Their hearts and minds and consciousness aligned and they *knew*: this is Jesus who we thought was utterly lost. And if this is Jesus, and he is still here teaching and nourishing us, then our grief is not ultimate. The love and compassion and kindness of God is. The new life of God is ultimate. This is what resurrection means.

There are so many kinds of Christians, followers of the Way of Jesus, followers of Jesus' Way of Love, around the world. For us as Episcopalians the breaking of the bread has predominantly meant Holy Communion, that moment when we have gathered in person every week and shared the bread and wine of Christ's actual presence together. That moment is truly sacred. It is transcendent. We miss it so very much. But are we bereft of that experience now, now when we like the disciples have lost the way things were? What is it that can help our hearts and minds and bodies and consciousness all align to recognize that Jesus is still here, that hope and the compassion and love of God cannot ever die or be separated from us?

As I've mentioned to you, there has been a small and very beautiful group of people who have gathered together every day for noonday and evening prayer since we have been prevented from coming to the building. I encourage every one of you to make time to attend this at least once, because what is happening during those gatherings has been like the breaking of the bread in this story. We have been coming to God and each other with our authentic experiences, doubts, wrestling and emotion. We have been breaking open the scripture to explore and wrestle with it with depth and grit. And we have been experiencing the compassion of God who is present with us. Steve Schewe led the group on Friday and he shared with me something someone said that day, that I'd like to share with you.

The group was exploring the story of Exodus, when Moses led the people of Israel through the Red Sea, out of slavery and into the wilderness. You would think that liberation from slavery would mean everything was fine. But everything was not fine. They were starving in the wilderness. And God gave them manna: enough nourishment for every day.

And someone in the group exploring this Friday mentioned a book called *Sleeping with Bread*. In that book the author, a Jesuit priest named Matt

Linn, tells the story of orphans in Europe during World War II. Someone created a home for these orphans while the war was still ongoing. And even though the orphans were much safer than they had been, they could not sleep. They had been traumatized and they were so afraid. The kind people caring for them tried everything they could think of to help them sleep but nothing seemed to work. Finally, one of them got the idea to give each orphan a piece of bread to sleep with. And that worked. You know why? Because each orphan had been most afraid of being hungry the next day the way they had been before. And the bread they held in their hands meant they knew they would not be hungry the next day. So finally they could rest, knowing that at least for the next day, they would be OK.

That daily bread is all about learning to trust God, just one day at a time, because especially in times like this, one day is all we can really handle. The bread Jesus broke for his disciples on the road to Emmaus was the bread of awakening hope in them, after he had met them, heard their stories, walked with them, showed them how their experience was part of scripture and God's great story and not outside of it. Then, and only then, were they ready to receive the nourishment from him of recognizing that he was still with them, through and during an actual meal. In a sense, Jesus was not just giving them that piece of bread. He was giving them the promise of his presence in tangible reality, like the piece of bread the orphans learned to sleep with every night in a way that calmed their trauma and fear and helped them learn to trust again.

God is with us.  
And God is kind.

Holy Communion is not at all the only way Jesus' real presence shows up for us in physical reality. I submit to you that God in Christ is always walking beside us, especially in our moments of greatest fear and loss, compassionately listening to our stories, and opening our hearts and minds

and consciousness, offering us something in our actual world that can give us hope and nourishment and communion with God's presence. And we can look for that thing, whatever it is, and take it in.

What are you hungry for?

If you are literally hungry, please pick up the phone and call your Care Circle leader, or call myself or Rex or John or Heidi or Chad or anyone at St John's, and we will do our utmost to get you nourished.

Some of you are hungry to feel OK again, and you really don't. Some of you are hungry for human companionship. Some of you wish you were coping better than you actually are and perhaps you feel ashamed about that. Some of you are desperate to find ways to help, and we are working on that.

Regardless of where you are and what you are experiencing, know that God in Christ walks with you like Jesus on the road to Emmaus, with kindness and compassion. It takes time to recognize this, and that is absolutely OK. We can walk with one another until our hearts begin to burn within us and eventually our eyes are opened. We can accompany one another through this even when the kind of togetherness we have isn't what we have always had and what we would most prefer. We can offer the love of God in Christ to one another and to our neighbors in real tangible ways even six feet or many miles apart. We can sleep with the bread of knowing that God will meet us as we are, and help us learn to trust again, because Christ is risen and no power on earth is stronger than that. Amen.