

**Sermon**  
**St. Peter's Quamichan – Pulpit Exchange with Jim Holland**  
**April 30, 2017**  
**The Road to Emmaus**  
**Luke 24:13-35**

What an amazing reading to have today! Today's Gospel reading – The Road to Emmaus - was pivotal in the process of my conversion. As many of you know, I was not raised in a Christian home and came to the church over a long time through my relationship with a certain man. So it's wonderful to be able to share with you my journey along that road – you, the community who supported me during my time of discernment, my time at seminary, and then through my deaconate. I share my story with you as a witness to the power of Scripture, the role of the heart in the spiritual journey, and as an affirmation of why the Eucharist is at the centre of our faith.

I married a man who had been ordained in the Roman church.... hey wait a second, you know this man! It's Jim, your interim priest! Jim was laicized – which means relieved of his vows - and continued to be a faithful churchgoer. And because I'm a naturally curious person and like to spend time with him, I attended mass regularly with Jim; enjoying the amazing music, the stained glass windows and the sense of peace. I had no other interest in what was going on and frankly, it all sounded like background noise to me, and when I listened more carefully, like mumbo jumbo.

When we moved to Victoria in 1987, we started attending the Roman Catholic cathedral with our two young sons. Over many months, I became aware of a yearning as I watched people go forward for

communion. That slight pull on my heart increased over time until I felt tears stinging my eyes when people went forward and I was required to stay in my seat.

That pull, that yearning, became a strong desire that moved me to begin the process of RCIA (the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) – a year-long program that helps participants decide if they want to be baptized. I enjoyed the course but remained undecided as to baptism until one rainy evening midway through the program. We were sitting in an over-heated room listening to a priest talk about scripture. I was starting to feel quite sleepy. Then the priest picked up a bible and started reading a story I had never heard. It was called The Road to Emmaus. I suddenly felt wide-awake. I was drawn into the story about 2 distraught disciples who are joined by a stranger who asks them what they are talking about. They are talking about the strange happenings that everyone else seems to know about. The stranger asks them questions and discovers how unhappy they are about their smashed expectations. They had thought this prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, was going to redeem them; free them from the oppressive rule of the Romans. They had put all their faith in him and he ended up being executed like a common criminal.

I found the story fascinating and was listening with all my attention; seeing the drama unfold in my mind's eye. And then something happened. When the disciples ask Jesus to stay with them “Because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over” it felt like my heart exploded in my chest. It was pounding wildly. I looked around to see if others were having the same experience. Everyone looked quiet

and sleepy. And then I heard the priest say the words, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road....?” In that instance, I knew in my heart of hearts that I had never been alone; I had never walked alone. My unformed yearning had been answered. I was asking Jesus to ‘stay with me,’ and he’d always been there. I knew then, without a shadow of a doubt, that I was ready to be baptized. And the rest is history.

Except the part about the bread. *Finally*, at the Easter Vigil in 1994, I was able to partake of the bread and wine. Finally. I had journeyed a long road and now I was able to eat with the One offering Himself in the bread and wine. My heart sang.

The Eucharist does not disappoint. The Eucharist continues to feed, humble and amaze me. Isn’t it interesting that Jesus doesn’t reveal himself in the conversation he has with the disciples along the long dusty journey? It’s only when they sit down to eat together, doing the most mundane of daily activities that Jesus is made visible to them. And then he disappears. They see him, and then they don’t. Where did he disappear to?

Every week we are invited to get close to the physical mystery of our Lord and Saviour. The Eucharist is the centre of our liturgy. The service builds to the consecration and sharing of the bread and wine. And then we give thanks for the presence of the One who feeds, encourages and sustains us.

Before I ever had any thought of becoming ordained, I met with the Bishop of the day to discuss how I might share my gifts in the Diocese. Bishop James asked me a lot of questions, many I had never

considered before. We had a profound discussion and then he became silent for what seemed like a long time. Then, out of the blue, he asked me, “Five years from now.... how do you see yourself? Administering communion or receiving it?” And without pause to think, I said, “Both.”

Participating in the Eucharist, as recipient or as one who administers is a life-changing activity. We have no idea of the profound effect ingesting the sacrament of life has on us. Really, we can't even imagine or know. We can only trust and participate. And even then, we have no control over what happens.

One of my spiritual teachers is Cynthia Bourgeault. She was raised a Quaker. In university, as a student of music, she attended what she thought was a concert in a church. But when an usher waved her to get up and file towards the front of the church, she realized she was in a service of some kind. She nodded “no” and the usher, irritated, insisted she stop holding things up and start moving. As she was walking up single file to the altar, she wondered what she should do. Getting close, she watched what others did and put her hands out as they did. Once she ingested the bread, something happened, and she knew she had been changed in some profound and inexplicable way. Thus started her amazing journey towards the priesthood in the Episcopalian church and her role as a spiritual teacher.

Jim has had the experience of someone coming to talk to him and saying, “What is going on at this church?” Jim didn't know if he was being accused of something. He asked for clarification. The person said, “Every time I come up for communion, I feel so overwhelmed with love I

feel like I'm going to fall over." The Eucharist defies explanation. It works on the heart level.

Some people have huge epiphanies and their lives are changed overnight. Most of us are changed slowly over time. Every time we partake of the bread and wine; the body and blood of Jesus, our hearts are changed a slight bit and become more oriented to God; more open to receiving God's love. And so we become a changed person, and together in community; a changed people.

Let us enter into this mystery. Let us travel together, encouraging each other not to be "slow of heart," when we are tempted to reason away the mystery at the centre of our faith.

Jesus is with us to stay. As we acknowledge His presence in the bread and wine, let us open our hearts to receive all that He is yearning to give us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.