

## Beggar's Posture

[Acts 2:14a,36-41](#)

[1 Peter 1:17-23](#)

[Luke 24:13-35](#)

[Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17](#)

In this morning's story from Luke, we hear about two disciples traveling from Jerusalem on the afternoon of the resurrection. They were discussing the events of the previous week when Jesus joins them, but they have no idea it is Jesus. Now, it's easy for us to be annoyed with these folks. We have leather bound copies of canonized Scriptures; we've read the stories and have the benefit of hindsight. We can read with clarity that Jesus had been warning them repeatedly about what was going to happen. They should have expected his death, and they should have expected his resurrection. Additionally, the women among us are thinking...if you'd just listened to the girls, you wouldn't be on your way out of the city right now and you wouldn't be feeling so dejected.

The truth is that we all live our stories without the benefit of a dress rehearsal or access to the full script and the disciples were no exception. Our spouses and friends tell us things all the time that we don't fully listen to or understand. So, the confusion, disappointment, and disorientation these disciples were experiencing was normal. We may have even been walking with them if we had been the ones trying to make sense of the chaotic and traumatic end of Jesus' life. The significant part of the story is not their confusion, it's Jesus' presence. We roll our eyes at these disciples, but Jesus saw their grief and bewilderment and met them in it. Ok, Ok, he did call them foolish and slow of heart to believe, but his annoyance quickly takes a back seat as he proceeds to explain everything that had been unclear to them. Jesus meets them before they understand. They weren't even trying to please God in their response to the week's events, they weren't currently praying or offering God penance in exchange for answers. And yet Jesus shows up. He offers his presence and understanding as a gift, freely, without reservation or requirement.

In today's story from Acts, the Holy Spirit had just been poured out on the disciples who had fire appear on their heads and were suddenly speaking in the languages of all the crowds who had gathered from distant lands for the celebration of Pentecost. It was a dramatic moment, and Peter used it to teach. Remember, this is the same mob who had insisted on Jesus' crucifixion. And Peter brazenly names them responsible for Jesus' murder. They could have been enraged and turned on him. Instead, they were cut to the heart and asked what to do. Jesus was dead at their hands and they felt it. But what can anyone do to atone for murder? Peter doesn't leave them in their remorse, and he doesn't chastise them further. He tells them to repent and be baptized.

Repentance means to change one's mind resulting in a change of behavior. The people had thought Jesus was a blasphemer. At Peter's explanation they recognized their error, so their minds were already changed. Now they needed to behave according to their new understanding. To be baptized is to identify oneself with the life of the church. Baptism is the way Christians outwardly demonstrate an inner change of mind. In this story, a rowdy mob of murderers were told to publicly identify themselves with the man they had killed and with that man's followers. Their willingness to receive the message would position them to receive the Spirit's empowerment. The Spirit was already being poured out. Miracles were happening. These people weren't asked to perform works of piety or penance. Their ego couldn't merit what God was offering. They were merely told to live according to their new understanding so they could **accept** what God was offering. God was offering God's own self, if they would be willing to receive that free gift.

In our Psalm, King David asks God to save his life. Our excerpt cuts out the portion detailing God's rescue of him. Then, in verse ten, David essentially asks the same question Peter's crowd asks. "How shall I repay the Lord"? David had found himself in an impossible situation, in grief, and fear, but God rescued him. And what is the response? David says, "I will lift up the cup of salvation." This image evokes the chalice at the altar. Lifting up the cup in Hebrew poetry is a way of expressing reception of a gift and the

thankfulness that is a natural response. David's rescue came before his response of praise. God didn't wait to save him until David had proven worthy. God's gifts are free. It is for us to **receive** them. The gifts themselves, when received, will transform our behavior. The transformation begins after we receive.

I came from a tradition with a low view of the sacraments. We had communion every month, but it was passed around on trays, and we all took individual pieces of bread and cups. There was no altar. When I first started attending an Episcopal church, I was profoundly impacted by the experience of going forward and receiving the eucharist. The Anglican tradition practices what is called "the beggar's posture". We hold our hands together outstretched, empty, desiring, willing to receive and thankful. Our upraised hands remind us of the equality of our inner poverty before God. This posture reminds our hearts to be eager, desiring what only God can give, and grateful.

The disciples who walked with Jesus on the Emmaus Road did not recognize him in his recitation of the Scriptures. Jesus, the Word of God, the Word that spoke the world into existence, who inspired the words of Scripture, remained unknown to the disciples even as the Living Word spoke the words of life to them. It was not until Jesus broke the bread and they received it from him that they recognized him. And the disciples who gathered in the upper room at Pentecost equally had no idea what they were waiting for. Jesus told them to wait and so they prayed together without understanding until the Spirit flooded the room and they received. None of us come empowered to live this life on our own, apart from the power of God. We were made in the image of God, and we require the Spirit of God to make our operational systems work properly. We are not offered that Spirit based on our merits. Peter says we were ransomed not with silver or gold, but with something that cannot be purchased. Jesus is always showing up and offering himself, we merely receive the gift and live in response.

Baptism is a perfect example of this. There is something profoundly beautiful and humbling about the baptism of infants. It is a recognition by the whole community of our own reception into the life of God and the church based on no merit of our own. Like infants, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, like the crowd of murderers at Pentecost... none of us have done anything to merit the love of God. None of us fully understand what God has or is doing. And God meets us anyway. God doesn't wait for our clarity or our readiness. God loves us, embraces us, offers God's own self to us so that we can receive. In baptism we are brought into something we could never initiate. God acts anyway. Then we can grow. And together we become the Body of Christ.

Receiving is our starting place. It is also our whole way through. The disciples at the table with Jesus would turn around and make a seven-mile trek back into Jerusalem after settling down to supper and an already full day of travel. The mob Peter addresses on Pentecost had to undergo such a complete transformation that they would align with the man whom they had recently killed and soon they would be giving up everything they owned to support their community. Receiving grace is not passive. It is an active engagement with that reception. What is put in our hands to receive is to be taken in, transforming our lives, and then poured back out freely to others. Following Christ is costly. Whatever sacrifices God is asking of us... like working on the relationship we've been avoiding, releasing the resource we've been holding, or beginning some spiritual discipline we know we need... Whatever the sacrifice, we find the clarity of the call and the willingness to respond by first receiving.

The humility of the beggar's posture is what positions us to receive. God is always offering participation with the divine life. When we receive it, then our understanding grows. It is that understanding which inspires **IN** us praise for God and love for others.

May we be a people who are aware of our own need, eager to receive, grateful for God's gift of participation in the divine life and overflowing with love in response. And may our hearts be always shaped by the beggar's posture.