**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**LUKE-095**. **THE MEAL AT EMMAUS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"30.* *And it came to pass, as He sat at meat with them, He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. 31. And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight."*

*Luke 24:30-31*

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the Gospel accounts of our Lord's intercourse with His disciples, in the interval between the Resurrection and His Ascension, is the singular union of mystery and simplicity which they present. There is a certain air of remoteness and depth over all the intercourse, as if it meant more, and was intended to teach more, than appears on the surface, as I believe it was intended. And yet, at the same time, there is, along with that, in most singular combination, the very utmost simplicity, amounting almost sometimes to baseness and rudeness, as for instance, here. Some poor house of entertainment, possibly, at any rate, some poor man's house, in a little country village; the company these two talkative, and yet despondent disciples; the fare and the means of manifestation a bit of barley-bread; and out of these materials are woven lessons that will live in the Church in all ages. He took bread and blessed it, and brake. These are the words, almost verbatim, of the institution of the Lord's Supper. They are the words, almost verbatim, with which more than one of the Evangelists describes the miraculous feeding of the four and the five thousand; and it was the old familiar act, expressed by the Evangelist by the old familiar words, that opened the discipleseyes, and they knew Him. How simply the process of discovery is told! It was quite natural that a casual stranger upon the road should not say who He was; it was quite as natural that when He entered into the closer relationship of sitting with the disciples at the table, and sharing their hospitality, they should expect, as indeed they did expect, that as they had been frank with Him, He would be frank with them, and they would find out now who this unknown teacher and apparent Rabbi was. And so, as it would seem, in silence, or at least with nothing of any moment, the meal went on, but all at once, at some point in the meal, the guest assumes the position of the master of the house, takes upon Himself the function and office of host, interrupts the progress of the meal by the solemn prayer of blessing; and whilst the singularity of the action drew their attention, perhaps some little peculiarity in His way of doing it, or something else, opened the door for a whole stream of associations and half-dormant remembrances to rush in, and they remembered what they had heard of the last supper,--for these two were not at it,--and they remembered what they had seen,--miraculous feedings; and they remembered no doubt how He had always done with them in the happy old days when He communed with them. At all events, by the natural action of breaking the bread and sharing it amongst them, the subjective hindrances which had stood in the way of their recognising Him dropped away like scales from their eyes, and they beheld Him, and then, without a word, He vanished out of their sight, and the wearied, hungry men girded up their loins and rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the brethren the story.

Now, I think that, taking the event as it stands before us, and especially marking the obviously intended parallelism in expression, and I hare no doubt in action, between former miracles, the institution of the Lord's Supper, and this neither sacramental nor religious meal in the little village--I think we may get some lessons worth pondering.

I confine myself quite simply to the three points of the narrative:--

* The distribution of the bread;
* The discovery;
* And the disappearance.

He took bread and blessed it, and brake and gave to them, and their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight.

**I. Look, then, for a moment or two at the thoughts which I think are intended to be conveyed to us by that first point--the action of breaking and distributing the bread.**

I have said, incidentally, in my previous remarks, that there is a singular air of remoteness, removedness, mystery, reticence, about our Lord's relations to His disciples in the interval of these forty days; and I suppose that that change from the frankness of His former relations and the close contact in which the Apostles and disciples had been brought during all the previous three years--I suppose that that was intended to be the beginning of the preparation of weaning and preparing them to do without Him altogether. And along with that removedness, there is also, as I take it, and as I have already said, a great depth of significance about the whole of these events which lead people to deal with them as being symbols, types, exhibitions on a material platform of great spiritual truths; and although the habit of finding symbolical meaning in historical events, especially as applied to the Gospels, has been full of all manner of mischief, yet that there is that element is not to be denied; and whilst we have to keep it down and be very careful in our application of it, lest in finding ingenious fanciful meanings, we lose the plain prose, which is always the best and the most important, yet that element is there, and we have to take heed that we do not push the denial of it to excess, as the recognition of it has often been pushed. And so, from these two points of view. I think the thing should be looked at. The plain prose, then, of the matter is this--that at a given point in this humble road-side meal, our Lord having been guest, having been constrained to enter in by the loving importunity of these people, becomes the host, takes upon Himself the position of the head of the household, and in that position so acts as to bring to the disciplesremembrance former deeds of miracles, and the institution of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, and that was the means of their recognition.

Well, then, if so, I think that we may say fairly that in this breaking and distribution of the bread, there is first of all this lesson--the old familiar blessed intercourse between Him and them had not been put an end to then by all that had passed during these three mysterious days; but they were as they used to be in regard to the closeness of their relationship and the reality of their intercourse. No doubt, in the former years, Christ had been in the habit of always acting as the Head of the little family. When they gathered for their frugal meals, He was the master, they the disciples; He the elder brother, and they gathered about Him. And He assumes the old position; and if we will try for a moment to throw ourselves into their position and to see with their eyes, we shall understand the pathetic beauty--I was going to say the poetic beauty, but perhaps you would not like that word to be applied to the history of our Redeemer--the pathetic beauty of the deed. They had been thinking of themselves as forsaken of Him; the grave had broken off all their sweet and blessed intercourse; they were alone now. We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel. He is gone! Even the poor consolation of looking upon the place where He lies is denied us; for whatever may be doubtful this is certain, that the grave is open and the body is not there. And so they felt lost and scattered; and there comes to them this gleam of consolation--I take my place amongst you just as I used to do; I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore. We used to sit together at the table; let that be repeated here once more that you may learn, and all the world through you may learn, that the accident of death, which affects only the externals of society, has no power over the reality of the bond that knits even two human hearts with love together, still less a power over the reality of the bond that binds us to our Master. Death vanishes as a nothing in their intercourse; they stand where they were; the fellowship is unbroken; the society is the same; all that there used to be of love and friendship, of peaceful concord, of true association; it abides for ever!

Thus, heavy with meaning and full of immortal hope may be the simplest act wrought with the simplest materials, when the dead Christ who lives takes His old place in the midst of His disciples, and once again as He used to do, parts the bread between them. And, dear brethren, though it has nothing to do with my present purpose, may this thought not add a wider application to our text; may it not be a comfort and hope to many of us to remember that the grim shadow that stretches athwart our path, and gathers into its blackness so many of our sunny sparkling joys, and takes the light and the movement and the colour out of them, is only a shadow, and that the substance lives in the shadow as it used to live in the sunshine, and passes through the shadow and comes out on the other side, blazing in more than its former lustre, and rich with more than its former preciousness? For all whom we have loved and lost, the death which was a nothing in regard to Christ's intercourse with His disciples, is a nothing, too, in regard to our real intercourse and sense of society and unity with them. They live in Him, and they are more worthy to be loved than ever they were before. He who has conquered Death for Himself has conquered it for us all; and every true and pure human affection rooted in Him is as immortal as the love that binds souls to Himself. Therefore, let us remember that they sit at His table, and that we shall sit there some day too.

**II. Well, then, still further, another idea that I think belongs to this first part of our thoughts as to the profound significance of our Lord's here assuming the office and function of host, is this--we are thereby taught the same lesson that we are taught by His institution of the Communion, and taught by the whole details of His relation to His disciples upon earth--that the true idea of the relation which results from Him and His Presence is that of the Family.**

He takes His place at the head of the table; He is the Lord of the household, though it be but a household of two men, and they belong to the family and the society which He founds. Now it seems to me that next to the great lesson which the Lord's Supper teaches us in reference to our individual dependence upon Him, His death as being all our hope and all our life, this is the most important lesson that it teaches--the simplicity of the rite, the fact that it was based upon the Jewish rite, which was a purely domestic one; the fact that our Lord steps into the place of the head of the household by His very presiding at the Passover service amongst His disciples; the fact that He parts the common materials of the common meal and uses them and it as the symbols of His death, and of our life thereby--all that teaches us the same thing which the whole strain of His teaching and the whole strain of the New Testament sets forth--that the Church of Christ is then understood when we think of it as being one family in Him, bound together by the bands of a close brotherhood, relying upon Him as the fountain of its life; having fellowship with one Father through that elder Brother; pledged, therefore, to all fraternal kindness and frankness of communion and of mutual help, and gladdened by the hope of journeying onwards to Him. We cannot, of course, apply the analogy round and round; but of all the forms of human association which Christ has honoured and glorified by laying His hand upon them, and showing that they are symbols of the society that He founds, and of which He is the centre, it is not the kingdom, but the family that is the nearest approach to the Church of the living God.

And you and I, Christian men and women, if we come and sit at that table of our Lord, let us remember that we thereby declare, not only for ourselves that we enter into individual relations of reliance upon Him, and draw our life from Him, but that we pledge ourselves to the family bond, to be true to the brotherhood, that we declare ourselves the sons of God and the brethren of all that are partakers of the like precious faith. The thing has become a word, a name amongst us. I wonder if any of you remember the bitter saying of one of our modern teachers; he says that he found out somehow or other how much less brethrenin the Church meant than brothersout of it. Let us learn the lesson and take the rebuke, and remember that if the Lord's Supper means anything, it means that we belong to the household of faith, and are members of the great family in heaven and in earth.

**III. Well, then, still further connected with this first idea of the lesson and significance of the distribution of the bread, I think we may take another consideration, which is, in fact, only another application of the one I have already been suggesting--Where Christ is invited as a guest, He becomes the host.**

They constrained Him to abide with them; they made Him welcome to their rude hospitality. It was little--a hut where poor men lay, a bit of barley-bread. But it was theirs, and they gave it Him; and He entered in and supped with them, and then, in the middle of it, the relations were inverted, and they that had been showing the hospitality became the guests, and the table that had been theirs became His. And He took the bread and gave it to them. You have the same inversion of relation in that first miracle that He wrought at Cana of Galilee, where invited as a guest, at a point in the entertainment He provides the supplies for the further conduct of it. You remember the words which contain the spiritual application of the same thought--Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man open the door, I will enter in and sup with him and he with Me. To put away the metaphor, it amounts to this--our Master never comes empty-handed. Where He is invited, He comes to bestow; where He is welcomed, He comes with His gifts; where we say, Do Thou take what I offer, He says, Do thou take Myself. All His requirements are veiled promises; all His commandments are assurances of His gifts. He bestows that He may receive; He seems to take that He may enrich. They that give to Christ receive back again more than all that they gave, according to the profound words, There is no man that hath left father or mother, or wife or children, or houses or lands, for My sake and the Gospel's, but shall receive a hundredfold more in this life, and in the world to come life everlasting. The Christ that is asked to come in order to receive, abides in order to bestow.

And then there is a second point, going on with the flow of this little narrative before us, about which a word or two may be said. The consequence of this assumption of the position of master, host, bestower is--Their eyes were opened, and they knew Him. The discovery of His person follows on the distribution of His gifts.

Now, there is one point to be remarked before I deal with the lessons which I think are capable of being gathered from this part of our subject, and that is, that this narrative gives no sort of support, as it seems to me, to the ordinary notion that, subsequent to the Resurrection, there had passed upon our Lord's corporeal frame any change whatsoever as the commencement of the glorification of His earthly body. If you observe, the course of the narrative takes pains to point out to us distinctly, that whatever may have been the reason why they did not recognise Him at first, that reason was entirely in them, and not at all in Him. It is not that He was changed; it is that their eyes were holden; and when they did recognise Him, it is not that any change whatsoever is recorded as having passed upon Him, but their eyes were opened, and they knew Him. And the same thing may be said, as I believe, about the whole of the appearances, mysterious as they were, of our Lord, in the interval between the Resurrection and the Ascension. I do not think, for my part, (although I would by no means speak with confidence about a matter that is so fragmentarily dealt with in Scripture), but I do not think, for my part, that the narrative gives any support whatsoever to the idea of any change analogous to that which takes place upon us at our resurrection, having begun to take place upon our Lord so long as He remained upon earth. The Ascension and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, in His case, are parts of one process. He was raised with the body with which He was crucified; He ascended up on high, and there the glorification, as far as Scripture teaches, is, I conceive, commenced. At all events, there is nothing in our narrative to support the idea of an incipient transformation having begun with the Resurrection.

But, passing by that, which has nothing to do with my main present purpose, I may notice just one or two considerations in reference to this discovery of our Lord. And the first and main one that I would suggest is this--Where Christ is loved and desired, the veriest trifles of common life may be the means of His discovery. We know not what was the special point which brought dormant remembrance to life again, and quickened the associations of the two, so that they knew Jesus; even as we do not know what was the hindrance, whether supernatural or whether by reason of their own fault, which prevented the earlier recognition; but this at least we see, that in all probability something in the manner of taking the bread and breaking it, the well-remembered action of the Master, brought back to mind the whole of the former relation, and a rush of associations and memories pulled away the veil and scaled off the mists from their eyes. And so, dear brethren, if we have loving, and waiting, and Christ-desiring spirits, everything in this world--the common meal, the events of every day, the most veritable trifles of our earthly relationships--they will all have hooks and barbs, as it were, which will draw after them thoughts of Him. There is nothing so small but that to it there may be attached some filament which will bring after it the whole majesty and grace of Christ and His love. Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all in remembrance of Him, and do all to His glory. Oh, if we had in our inmost spirits a closer fellowship with Him, and a truer relation to Him, we should be more quick of apprehension. And, as in regard to those that we love, when they are away from us, the fold of a garment, some bit of cloth lying about the room, something upon the table, some common incident of the day that used to be done in company with them, may bring a flood of memories that sometimes is too strong for a weak heart, so with the Lord, if we loved Him--everything would be (as it is to those whose ears are purged) vocal with His name, and everything would be flushed with the light that falls from His face, and everything would suffice to remind us of our love, our hope, our joy. Especially let us remember that He has entrusted--with strange humility and with wonderful knowledge of us, and with the truest sympathy and tenderness for our weakness--He has entrusted a large portion of our most spiritual remembrance and recognition of Him to material things. Did it ever strike you what a depth of what I may call Christ's condescension there lay in this? Take this bread and this wine, and if you will not remember Me because I loved you so well, if you will not remember Me because I died for you, if earthly things and material realities will drive Me out of your thoughts, at least remember Me because and when earthly things and material realities become My agents and My memorials. If you forget the Cross, perhaps a bit of bread will remind you of Me; and I am not too proud to spurn the remembrance that roots itself even in the material things of earth and by such means as that. He took the bread and brake it. They had listened to all His words upon the road, and it never occurred to them who He was; they had walked beside Him all day long, and even their burning hearts did not make them suspect that it was the Master. It must needs be so--they whom wisdom and truth and His spiritual Presence cannot teach to recognise, may be led to recognise Him by the movement of His hands with the barley loaf, and some intonation of His voice in blessing it. This do in remembrance of Meis the word of that deep pity that knows our frame and remembers that we are dust, and is a word of the most marvellous condescension that ever was uttered in human ears.

**IV. And then there is the final consideration here upon which I touch but for a moment.**

The distribution and the discovery are followed by the disappearance of the Lord, They knew Him, and--and what? And He let their hearts run over in thankful words? No. They knew Him, and so they all went back to Jerusalem happy together? No. They knew Him, and--He vanished out of their sight. Yes, for two reasons. First, because when Christ's Presence is recognised sense may be put aside. It is expedient for you that I go away. You and I, dear brethren, need no visible manifestation; we have lost nothing though we have lost the bodily Presence of our Master. It is more than made up to us, as He Himself assures us, and as we shall see ourselves if we think for a moment, by the clearer knowledge of His spiritual verity and stature, by the deeper experience of the profounder aspects of His mission and message, by the indwelling Spirit, and by the knowledge of Him working evermore for us all. His going is a step in advance. If I go not away the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. The earthly manifestation was only the basis and the platform for that which is purer and deeper in kind, and more precious and powerful; and when the platform has been laid, then there is no need for the continuance thereof. And so, when He was manifested to the heart He disappeared from the eyes; and we, who have not beheld Him, stand upon no lower level than they who did, for the voice of our experience is, Whom having not seen we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.

And for another reason.--When Christ is discerned there is work to be done. Their eyes were opened, and they knew Him, and He vanished out of their sight; and ... they rose up that same hour; and returned to Jerusalemand said, He was known to us in breaking of bread, and He talked with us by the way. Yes, the vision of Christ binds us to work, and while the more close and intimate and silent communion has its rights and its place in life, it is never to be made a substitute for the active exercise of our Christian vocation to bear witness of Him, and to tell His name to those who need the consolation of His Resurrection, and the joyful news that He lives to bless. So then that meal by the wayside may stand as type and symbol of the way in which we, like the two pedestrians on the road and at the table, may have heart intercourse with Jesus, and may be impelled thereby to labour for Him.

There was another time, after the Resurrection, when in like manner we read that our Lord took bread, and blessed and brake and gave it to them; and that was in that mysterious meal upon the shores of the Galilean Lake, which has always been recognised as having a symbolical meaning--though the exposition and detail have often been exaggerated and made absurd. In the one case it was two travellers who met their Lord; it was in an inn that the recognition took place; it was a brief moment of vision, followed by disappearance, and the disappearance led on to work; but in the other story it was when the morning broke that the Lord was manifest; it was after the night of toil that His form appeared; His words to them were, Bring of the fruits of your labours and lay them upon the beach at My feet. And in the light of the eternal morning, after the weary night of toil, they who on earth in their journey and pilgrimage have had Him walking with them as third in their sweet society, and sitting with them in the tents and changeful residences of earth, may expect to find Him waiting for them upon the shore; and, as one says, It is the Lord!and another dashes through the water to reach Christ, the invitation to all of them will be, Come and sit with Me at My table in My kingdom; I provide the meal, and you add to it by that which you have caught. They rest from their labours and their works do follow them. And so they go no more out, but are ever with the Lord.