



**GRAY'S
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Sung Eucharist in Eastertide - May 9th 2021

“Made known in the breaking of bread”

1 Cor 11: 23-26 & Luke 24: 13-31

Sigmund Freud wasn't known for cracking jokes, but he did tell this story about an insurance salesman, an atheist who has always denied the existence of God, now lying on his death bed. His family call in the local priest in the hope that he might be converted before he dies. The interview goes on for so long that they think the priest has pulled it off. But when the priest finally emerges he looks utterly dejected. He has failed in his mission to convert him. But, he thinks, look on the bright side: at least I'm now fully insured. The moral of the story is clear: everyone is selling something.

We live in a consumerist age. When Lockdown happened, people turned to online shopping not just for the goods but for consolation. You know the joke: forget Descartes and “Cogito ergo sum”. Now it's “Tesco ergo sum” – “I shop, therefore I am”. We should be grateful that that hasn't been applied to COVID vaccinations, with priority going to the highest bidder. Although of course we've been able to roll it out for everyone because we cornered the market at the start. Other nations, through their poverty or poor leadership, must now wait their turn.

One of the slang words for money is Bread. You may remember Carla Lane's 1980s sitcom with that name, about a Liverpool family living off the Benefits system. And Bread, in one way or another, is what brings us together this morning. But in ways which take us in a very different direction from consumption and consumerism.

We read the Easter story of two people, perhaps a man and his wife, on the road to Emmaus. They are met by a Stranger and tell him what's been happening back in Jerusalem. They'd been followers of Jesus of Nazareth, who'd been arrested and killed. So obviously they'd been wrong. He couldn't have been who he said he was. What a wasted effort! But now some people were saying that this Jesus wasn't dead but alive. And here comes the Easter point. The Stranger doesn't do a Paul Daniels and reveal himself as the Risen Christ. When they stop at the Inn he pretends to go on, they press him to stay, he sits with them to share a meal, and only when he blesses the bread, when he breaks the bread and gives it to them, do they realise who he is. He makes himself known in the breaking of the bread.

Scripture says a lot about bread. When the People of Israel were in the wilderness, moaning to Moses that he'd only brought them there to die, God provided manna from heaven to keep them alive. When Jesus saw the crowds before him, hungry and lost, he had compassion on them and fed them from the small number of loaves in the peasant boy's basket. He told us to pray "Give us today our daily bread", which means, the bread we need for today. Like the manna, not bread for tomorrow, not a surplus of bread to sell to those without, but enough for today.

Christianity is a very materialistic religion. It begins with the creation of physical matter, and of people whose bodies need food. So the prophets rail against those who demean the bodies of the poor by cheating them and refusing them the bread they need. Jesus told parables like the one about the man who stores up goods for himself but never gets to see the benefit. That's why we've seen the Archbishops and the Cardinal denounce the Government cuts in International Aid, reducing it by four billion pounds. This is not the Church "getting involved in politics" but simply preaching the Gospel. Give us this day our daily bread. Bread matters. And especially to the hungry.

But as Jesus said to the devil when he was hungry in the wilderness, man (or woman) does not live by bread alone. And so, he didn't only feed hungry people, he went on to say, "I am the bread of life". Make of that what you will. At the very least it fundamentally undermines consumerism, the belief that we can fulfil ourselves and measure others by the accumulation of this world's goods.

In his new book "Value(s)" the former Bank of England governor Mark Carney tells of his meeting with Pope Francis, who told him: "humanity is many things—passionate, curious, rational, altruistic, creative, self-interested. But the market is (only) one thing: self-interested. Your job is to... turn the market back into humanity." So Carney regrets how we have moved from a "market economy" to a "market society," with no room for valuing the things—like beauty, happiness, joy, relationships—that make up the tapestry of a rich and wonderful life. To fix this, he says, we need first to unearth our deep-rooted values, and then build up from them.

And so back to Emmaus – and the breaking of the bread. And back to bodies. The body of Jesus was broken on the Cross. The resurrection of Jesus is not about him being resuscitated, as if the death had never happened, but about the power of God to overcome all that breaks the bodies of men and women, and everything that says to men and women that self-interest, consumption and commercialisation are the only things that matter.

All of that comes together and brings us together, here at this Eucharist. It was instituted at that final meal, the Last Supper, on the night before Jesus died. It represents the self-giving of God himself. It offers to us bread to feed our souls, bread to keep us going for the journey ahead. It calls us to build a world where all people may have enough bread for today, and the hope of bread for tomorrow. So this morning, may Christ make himself known here, in the breaking of the bread.