

“They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread”

I learned some good manners when I was a child. I learned that one does not chew with his mouth open, I learned that forks go on the left, knives and spoons on the right. I learned one is not supposed to make unpleasant noises at the table, that is, “No, thank you,” is to be preferred to “Yecch” when one chooses not to sample a vegetable. I learned that the current dog, first a golden retriever, then a Dobermann Pinscher, should always be offered the last morsel... come to think of it, I don't think that was manners, I think it was self-preservation, to get doggie breath away from me before one of my mother's sumptuous desserts. But back to manners.

I also learned that one should always break a piece of bread in half before one consumes it. I have no idea where that rule came from, or if it even made sense in days of sliced bread.

But I know this much: breaking bread was right there at the center of what it meant to be a Christian in the very earliest days of the church.

Today's Scripture lesson is a snapshot of the very earliest church, the gathering of

believers in Jerusalem, gathered together at Pentecost, just seven weeks after Jesus rose from the dead.

And did you notice in our Scripture this morning that both in public and private, breaking bread was at the center of it all?

In public, they would devote themselves to the apostles' teaching, hearing from them what Jesus taught, what he did. How he lived, how he died, how he lives again. And they would pray together, and observe the wonders and signs performed in Jesus' name. They would share, their possessions, they would give to anyone in need. And they would devote themselves to the breaking of bread.

In private, it was the same. In their homes, they would break bread together. The choice of language, "to break bread," is not accidental. It reminded that earliest church of something: it reminded them of Jesus. His body broken. His life given.

And even as they celebrated their resurrection faith, they remembered, they remembered it was this incredible love bound up in the broken body, in Jesus' sacrifice for them, that made the community what it was. As they broke bread, whether in public worship or in private gatherings, they remembered Jesus present among them in spirit as he had been

present in the flesh among the apostles.

Two thousand years later and an ocean away from that earliest church in Jerusalem, may it mean to us what it meant to them. Like them, may we again remember who we are. As we devote ourselves again to the breaking of the bread now, as they did then, may we know ourselves again to be the community called into being by Jesus Christ himself. May we be a community that seeks nothing less than to know Christ, to live Christ, to share Christ.

And this week, if you happen to have a slice of bread, or a roll or even a hush puppy, this is Eastern North Carolina after all, I invite you to break it. But not for the sake of good manners. But to remember again and again, the one whose body was broken for us that we might be made whole.

And as you do, may you savor again the power and the promise of the Bread of Life, peace that passes all earthly understanding, hope for even the darkest night, and promise of life abundant and eternal.

In the breaking of the bread we know again Christ within us and among us, and life again filled with promise and possibility.

And Jesus himself invites us all to share in this feast of his incredible love. Come, let us  
break bread together.