

# Broken Bread, Kindled Hearts

## Breaking Bread in the Early Church

Have you ever wondered just how and when Communion was first celebrated in the early Church? The Aramaic text of Acts 2:42 gives a surprising clue.

Acts 2:42:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to **the breaking of bread** [AR ܩܘܕܫܐܘܬܐ “the Eucharist” or “holy communion”] and the prayers.

Why did the author of the Aramaic version of Acts use the word for “communion” instead of the words for “breaking of bread”? Could it be that the believers actually began celebrating Communion from the earliest days of the Church?

This is not as surprising as it may seem when you consider how fresh Christ’s instructions about the memorial were as of the Day of Pentecost — hardly more than fifty days old. Communion would have been one of the first actions the disciples could take in remembrance of what the Master had accomplished for them.

This is not to dispute that the believers would enjoy common meals together, where Christians of all stripes would fellowship at table together on equal terms, whether rich or poor, masters or slaves.

Acts 2:46:

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,

According to Conybeare and Howson, Communion was originally administered at the close of these common meals. So, far from being

divergent practices, common meals and Communion actually accompanied one another.

## Breaking Bread on the Road to Emmaus

The Last Supper was not the last time that Jesus broke bread with his disciples. Let's take a look at one such instance of breaking bread in

Luke 24:13-16:

That very day [the day of the discovery of the empty tomb] two of them [two disciples] were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,

and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened [the crucifixion, most assuredly; but also the reports of Jesus' resurrection].

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.

But [their eyes were kept from recognizing him](#).

Isn't it interesting how many things we can miss when we're not seeing clearly spiritually. It's as if we're asleep at the switch. Though it was clearly Jesus, they didn't recognize him.

Luke 24:17,18:

And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

They were up on the news; but not yet on the Good News.

Luke 24:19-21:

And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,

and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.

The hurt and the pain of the crucifixion was still fresh in their minds. Did they realize that the Lamb of God had been crucified at the very day and hour of the Passover sacrifice? Probably not.

Luke 24:22-24:

Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning,

and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.

Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”

Jesus patiently listened all this time, learning what their thoughts were so that he could respond.

Luke 24:25:

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and **slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!**

Usually, we speak of someone being slow in the sense of intellectually slow. Here, Jesus admonished them as being *slow of heart* — slow to receive and believe the truth.

Luke 24:26,27:

Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Wouldn't you have loved to be a "fly on the wall" hearing the Master himself expound to these men from the Scriptures on his sufferings and glory!

Luke 24:28,29:

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther,

but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them.

Wouldn't you also have desired to lodge a guest who had so freely and unexpectedly uplifted you with the Word in a time of great need? And Jesus gave them that opportunity.

Luke 24:30:

When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.

Here he was, a guest in their home, and acting like the host! "He took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them."

Luke 24:31:

And [their eyes were opened, and they recognized him](#). And he vanished from their sight.

Earlier their eyes were kept from recognizing him. Now, having heard from the Master's own lips the truths regarding the crucifixion and the resurrection, their eyes were opened and they knew it was him.

Luke 24:32:

They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”

Something had awakened within them, a fire burning in their hearts. They were receiving answers to their deepest questions as they gave their hearts fully to receive and take in the truth.

Luke 24:33,34:

And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together,

saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”

So, they now discovered that they were not the only ones to have seen him — Simon had as well. That was reaffirmation of the first order!

Luke 24:35:

Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Now it was their turn to recount what had happened to them. And just how had he made himself known to them? *In the breaking of the bread*. Jesus hadn’t eaten with them; he simply took, blessed, broke, and gave them the bread, and then he was gone. *But his message lingered in their hearts*.

Jesus had just taught them from the Scriptures about his crucifixion and resurrection, and they had taken that discovery deep within their souls. They had invited him into the intimacy of their home so they could share a meal together. And now, in that very act of breaking the bread, their eyes were opened and they saw him for who he was: the Lord Jesus Christ himself!

At the Last Supper Jesus had instructed the disciples present to observe the memorial of the bread and wine in remembrance of him.

Here again, Cleopas and friend were able to break bread in the Master's presence. How intimate, and how personal!

The encounter on the road to Emmaus took place the first day of the week, the day after Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Luke 24:1:

But on [the first day of the week](#) [literally, "the first (day) of the Sabbaths"], ...

Luke 24:13:

[That very day](#) two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,

What was the significance of this "first (day) of the Sabbaths"? It was:

- The first day after the weekly sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread;
- The first day in the counting of the fifty days until Pentecost; and
- The day of the firstfruits wave offering, when Jesus presented himself to the Father as the firstfruits of the resurrection harvest.

When Jesus broke bread with Cleopas and friend, it was a day to acknowledge and celebrate what had happened — the crucifixion and the resurrection — but also a day to anticipate greater things yet to happen — represented by the feast of Pentecost.

## Breaking Bread in Troas

Twenty-eight years later, another significant bread-breaking occurred on this same special day: "the first (day) of the sabbaths."

Acts 20:6,7:

but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

On the first day of the week [literally, “the first (day) of the sabbaths”], when we were gathered together [to break bread...](#)

The Aramaic text of this verse says, “to break pieces of the Eucharist” or holy communion. There is reason to believe that the fellowship at Troas had been scheduled on this particular date with the intention of celebrating communion with the believers gathered there.

Let’s continue reading the account.

Acts 20:7-12:

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered.

And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead.

But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, “Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.”

And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread [the Greek text says “the” bread — indicating the Communion bread] and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

So, to reiterate, the sequence of events was as follows:

- The believers gathered for Communion.
- Paul taught at length in a crowded space.
- A young believer named Eutychus fell asleep, fell out of the third-story window, and died.
- Paul raised him from the dead.
- Paul then partook in a communion meal with the believers.

The Passion Translation underscores this understanding in the opening and closing verses of the passage.

Acts 20:7a, 11a [TPT]:

On Sunday we gathered [to take communion](#) and to hear Paul preach...

Paul went back upstairs, [served communion](#), and ate a meal with them...

Look at the parallels between this communion service and the earlier record in Luke 24, where Jesus broke bread with the disciples.

- God's man opened the Scriptures to God's people regarding Christ's accomplished work: the crucifixion and the resurrection.
- God's miraculous power was on display, and there was great rejoicing as a result.
- Together all partook in the breaking of bread, and together all recognized what God had done for them in Christ.

Returning to the record of Luke 24, the two disciples had just told the eleven of how they had broken bread with the resurrected Christ. Little did they know that their Scripture discovery session was about to continue, with the same instructor no less!

Luke 24:36-48:

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"



But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.

And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do [doubts arise in your hearts?](#)”

See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”

They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that [everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.](#)”

Then he [opened their minds to understand the Scriptures](#), and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,

and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

You are witnesses of these things.

Just imagine how thrilled the entire group gathered there must have been to learn these truths in the wake of a first encounter with the resurrected Christ!

Our hearts too can be kindled as we present ourselves together at the Lord’s Table, doing these things in remembrance of him. What a glorious privilege is ours to break bread recognizing him!