

**Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles**  
**Third Sunday of Easter – April 30, 2017 – Communion**  
**Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister**

**Luke 24:13-35**

**For Reflection**

**"There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."**

- Leonard Cohen, Canadian Musician (1934-2016)

**Breakage**

When I was a kid I loved secret codes. Heck, I love them now. My girlfriends and I would write notes to each other in written American Sign Language, chicken scratches that we designed on our own. When Scholastic Books had a volume about secret codes and decoding, I bought it. And when I went to seminary I discovered that the Bible was full of secret codes that had to be broken before it could be understood. I was hooked. Here's an example.

**Luke 24:13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem...18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas...**

On that same day – meaning the Day of Easter – Resurrection Day – two disciples are walking along. They are getting out of Dodge – on a seven-mile trek to an inn where they can get some distance from the events of that morning.

There are two of them. Jesus sent the disciples out two-by-two – which was a safety measure on roads where robbers were common. He also made sure that women disciples traveled with a man – to protect them from more than robbery. Those women were referred to as “sister-wives” – also as a form of protection. But in the movement around Jesus, women were full disciples – not just companions for the men or sugar-mamas for the movement. Mary of Bethany sat at his feet. Mary Magdalene had a full gospel written about her dialogues with Jesus. The women engaged in discussion along with the men – something that made the movement incredibly radical.

Many of the surviving written texts – written by men – will name the male disciples but not the women. Note that this text names Cleopas – but not the other. So, if you decode this text, you see that two disciples, a man and a woman, encounter Jesus and the THREE of them discuss the meaning of events in light of scripture. From there one can study all kinds of implications – and perhaps understand more clearly the devastation felt by women in the movement when the radical inclusion of Jesus shifted back to a hierarchy with men at the top.

**Luke 24:33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem... 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.**

At the end of the text these two – this man and this woman – having experienced the resurrection that morning – having walked seven miles – get up from the table to walk another seven miles back to share their experience of meeting the risen Christ. That's a heck of a lot of walking.

These people were not wimps. Their leader aka messiah had been killed two days earlier – the political and religious authorities were ticked off at their movement and had threatened their lives – they had found an empty tomb where Jesus' body was supposed to be – walked their feet off – met and talked for several hours with a dead guy – found him to be alive – and walked back in the evening to share their experiences.

And if any of these disciples were worth their salt – if they had paid any kind of attention while Jesus talked and told stories over the last three years – if they had any kind of imagination regarding the use of simile and metaphor – they would have understood the code language in the words and actions of our two walkers.

In the aftermath of incredible tragedy and loss, Jesus was made known to them – he was recognized – at table – in the breaking of the bread.

And that's the deal – that's the secret hidden in two thousand years of translation and interpretation and oppression and empire and warfare and welfare and caves and cathedrals. Life is a matter of pressing on in the wake of disaster and loss. It is a doubly-long walk into the night trying to make sense of it all. It is encountering G-d in the brokenness of bread and body, spirit and community. Life is aftermath – and what you do with it – for the rest of your life.

Dad and I weren't walking but we were in the car together for a couple of hours – a trip to the VA and back. Dad was talking about his cousin Albert – with whom he grew up and commiserated in any number of questionable teen activities. Dad said, "I still can't believe Albert is dead. It's hard to grieve for someone if you can't believe they're dead." How many of us have someone from our past who had died but isn't dead to us yet? I still think about calling my Aunt Cloie – Dad's sister – to tell her about my son Peter – and she's been gone twenty years...

How many of us have had broken relationships – divorces – breakups – disappearances (now called "ghostings") – and continued to deal with the consequences of having known and loved and grappled with those people?

I attended at poetry workshop decades ago led by Terre Ouwehand – author of a collection of poems called THE DEBRIS OF THE ENCOUNTER. That phrase became stuck in my mind like the refrain of “We will, we will rock you!” These words summarize my life. What you see here in front of you is the debris of the encounter – okay, a series of encounters – with people and experiences and brain chemistry and G-d in person.

Look at your own self: see the debris of the encounters of your lives.

This is the aftermath. This is what IT – life/faith/breath – is about.

And it is in the breaking – in the breakage – in the debris – that we find meaning and solutions and answers and strength and, if we are lucky and persistent, beloved community.

KPCC has spent this week remembering the L.A. Civil Unrest aka Riots of 25 years ago. I invite you to read a rather balanced article by Mark Ridley-Thomas, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, Los Angeles County. I worked with Mark on some social change projects back in the 1980’s and he was always kind of a volatile guy. But we have both matured and I have always appreciated his perspective. His article “Lessons Learned from LA’s 1992 Civil Unrest” begins this way:

“A riot is the language of the unheard,” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said.

On April 29, 1992, the unheard were unleashed, leading to one of the most disturbing chapters in the history of Los Angeles.

When the civil unrest over the verdict in the Rodney King case ended five days later, the toll included 54 people dead, 2,000 injured and 12,000 arrested. More than 1,000 buildings were set ablaze and 4,500 looted, resulting in over \$1 billion in property damage. As a newly elected member of the City Council, I saw our recently renovated district office – a mini-City Hall – become a smoldering ruin.

Even now, 25 years later, not all of the social and economic injustices that became kindling for “the unheard” have been snuffed out. And yet, I believe quite a lot has been done – just not enough. I call it strategic dissatisfaction.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/lessons-learned-from-las-1992-civil-unrest\\_us\\_59023961e4b0768c2682e423](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/lessons-learned-from-las-1992-civil-unrest_us_59023961e4b0768c2682e423)

He goes on to give both hope and caution – describing the good that came from that incredible social rupture – and what needs to be done economically and politically – to keep it from rupturing again. We go on in the aftermath – and look for the calloused hands of the Divine at work in the broken places.

None of this is, of course, on the agenda in the various houses in Washington D.C. In the aftermath of a broken election, there continue to be marches in the street – women, immigrants, taxpayers, scientists, climate protectors. Just as a human body that has

been injured rushes blood cells and coagulants and disinfectants and healing chemicals to the ruptured area – our society is attempting to flush out the poisons and infections that are currently getting in the way of healing our social and environmental body.

Sometimes another rupture is needed to clean out the infected area and aid the healing.

Sometimes breakage is called for – and can lead to stronger bones – scarred but stronger skin – traumatic memories but certain wisdom.

The planet itself is speaking in code – a code that is not very hard to break – especially with scientists on the job.

Climate change – global warming – is designed to wipe pestilence off the face of the earth. And we are that pestilence when it comes to the environment. In order for the planet to survive, we may have to go.

This is the ultimate breaking point. This is the aftermath.

We are living amid the debris of our human encounter with the laws of nature.

As Al Gore said, all of this is a very “Inconvenient Truth.”

Our response to this information will either save us or do us in.

As we break bread this morning may our eyes be opened to see the Divine – present at table with us.

As we break from this place after worship, may we continue to be aware of the Divine – walking next to us – helping us to decode the meaning of this life and make better choices about how to navigate the challenging days ahead.

In the debris of every encounter may we find the materials needed to repair the world and our own souls.

We're not dead yet.

Thanks be to G-d.

## Luke 24:13-35

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" 19 He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 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 took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."

25 Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. **30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him;** and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" **35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.**