**In the Breaking of Bread**

**Easter 2 Narrative Lectionary**

**April 23, 2017**

Luke 24: 12-35 Russell Mitchell-Walker

On Sept 19, 2016, the body of Annie Pootooogook was found in the Ottawa River. She was Inuk artist and an Ottawa police officer, Chris Hrnchiar posted some comments on Facebook in response to an Ottawa Citizen article about her death. He [stated](http://aptnnews.ca/2016/11/01/ottawa-police-officer-chris-hrnchiar-pleads-guilty-to-discreditable-conduct/) “that Pootoogook’s death “could be a suicide, accidental, she got drunk and fell in the river and drowned, who knows.” He also wrote that” much of the Aboriginal population in Canada is just satisfied being alcohol or drug abusers.”” Following an investigation, he was charged and pleaded guilty to two counts of discreditable conduct, suspended and required to take diversity sensitivity training. He apologized to everyone for his actions including the aboriginal community. Such comments hurt and traumatized many in a community already suffering deeply from systemic racism, poverty and violence, often contributed by their experience in the residential schools system.

The community of Jesus’ followers were also traumatized by what they had experienced. Jesus was cruelly treated, tortured, mocked and abused by the system that executed him. This was horrifying for his followers to watch and experience. It is in this context that the two followers were travelling away from Jerusalem to Emmaus, distraught and grief-stricken as they recalled the events of the last few days. They couldn’t believe that this horrible death had happened and now they were dealing with an incredible story from the women that his body was gone. It is in this context that a stranger, who they did not recognize as Jesus came to join them as they walked. They had a conversation that included Jesus describing to them the message of the prophets and the scriptures that pointed to the importance of Jesus’ suffering to show God’s glory. As they came to a fork in the road, to their destination, they encourage this stranger Jesus to come with them and offer him hospitality, the same kind of hospitality that Jesus taught them. They share a meal together, and as Jesus breaks bread, they recognize Jesus in the gesture and act of sharing – muscle memory kicks in - and Jesus disappears. They then rush back, 7 miles to Jerusalem, even though it would have been dark and dangerous by then, to tell the other disciples and the rest of the community.

So as we reflect on this story, it is an opportunity for us to explore how do we extend hospitality to strangers? What do you do in your neighbourhood or home? What do we do in our church community? The two examples I think of are our family dinners and IMCF. At our last family dinner there were close to 15 people who came that we did not know before we started this program. A core of them have become regulars and the group keeps growing. By offering a meal together in community we offer hospitality and seek to build community. I believe they are having a positive experience and enjoy what we are offering as they keep coming back and bringing their friends and family. At the IMCF, while we are not offering the hospitality in our space, we go and help prepare the meal, and sit at table together. For me the most important part of this service is the opportunity to ‘break bread’ together and share a meal in community. I often tell Peter, our volunteer organizer for this program, not to worry about having too many volunteers because if there is no work to do, it is an opportuntiy to visit with the people there and build relationships. This is an important part of breaking bread together. It is in the sharing of the meal that the travellers saw Christ. Can we do the same whenever we have a meal with others? It is important to see the Christ in those we break bread with. This is the importance for families as well. In our busy lives, it is important to make time for meals together to connect with each other, and share love and community. In this we meet Christ – the Christ in us.

In breaking bread together we can experience companionship. Our English word, companion, speaks of sharing food. It’s root is com which means together and pan which is bread. We talk of sharing life together when we talk of companionship for we know that life is better when shared with others, and a common and important part of that sharing is by eating together. It’s not about the food, it is about the eating and sharing together. In this story and in the Last Supper, the breaking of bread is an act of companionship and solidarity, of loyalty and friendship, of mutuality and sharing. Officer Hrnchiar mentioned earlier, lived out this in his work toward [reconciliation](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/hrnchiar-makes-amends-with-inuit-community-and-veldon-coburn-1.4076246) after apologizing for his racist behaviour.

Following his guilty plea and apology, Chris Hrnchiar didn’t stop there. Recognizing the gravity of his words, and taking seriously the diversity training, he then reached out to the Inuit and aboriginal community in Ottawa. He attended feasts, met with elders, and sent letters of apology, including to Veldon Coburn, who had adopted Annie’s daughter. Coburn had sent letters of concern to Ottawa’s mayor, the chief of police, and called out Hrnchiar publicly when he learned that he was a sergeant in the police force. Then he heard from family members that Hrnchiar was visiting Inuit communities, attending feasts and meeting with Elders. After learning about the aboriginal history including the impact of European colonialization and understanding how much his words hurt, Chris knew that he needed to apologize to Veldon Coburn in person. They met face to face, shared a meal together, and had a very emotional reconciliation. Through the efforts and commitment of Hrnchiar taking seriously his mistake, by breaking bread together, two people at odds, became friends, companions. The question could be asked, in whom might we see Christ in the breaking of the bread in this situation? Perhaps both. Chris Hrnchiar exemplified how to live out an apology and gained a deeper understanding of what it means to be in solidarity with a people who have suffered and are suffering. Transformation happens when we truly live out what it means to be in communion, in community together.

President’s Choice had an ad out recently that has been shared fairly widely on social media. It communicates how eating together is important and can build community.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDuA9OPyp6I>

May we offer hospitality to those and around us and be transformed by the experience. May we be open to seeing the Christ in those we break bread together with. May the resurrected Christ move through us that we may embody love and compassion, companionship and solidarity.