

St John with St Mark, Bury
Acts 3:1-10. Luke 24:13-35.

I think that there is one particular trap that preachers can fall into. That is, the assumption that their definition of God is the only definition and that we have got God trussed up by that definition. There is a little safe at the top end of church. It contains the sacrament of Holy Communion. We can read this safe a number of ways round. We could see the safe as containing the sacrament for the sick and the troubled to take to these people and enable them to receive Holy Communion. Or we could read the aumbry as being the safe in which we have God locked up. The same question is present with the altar rails. The rails help people kneel. But, David will solemnly shut the gates. Who are we keeping out? Who are we locking in? Are we fencing in God with our definition.

Today's reading from Luke's gospel we have a number of points running. The first is the role of Jesus. The disciples do not recognize him as they walk along to Emmaus. The disciples recognize Jesus when he breaks bread. In other words, the celebration of Holy Communion is the moment when we recognize most clearly the presence of Christ amongst us. Secondly, they recognize Jesus but Jesus fades from their sight. Jesus is not to be controlled by the disciples. Instead, Jesus maintains his own definition of himself. What we are left with is the memory of a shape-shifter whom we know in the breaking of bread.

And then the body of Christ is shaped by the sacrament of Holy Communion. In the Last Supper Jesus took bread and blessed it, broke the bread and shared it out. In Holy Communion we have bread taken, blessed, broken and shared out. We in turn are taken. God chooses us to be one of God's people. It is not us who choose God, but God chooses us. I remember when I said I needed to join the Church of England. It was an Ash Wednesday and reading part of Luke's gospel, I was moved to tears and knew then that I had found my spiritual home. God chose me. Not I chose God.

We are taken. Then we are blessed. In French, the word to bless also means to wound. We are marked in being blessed. We are marked out as being holy, a fit offering to God. We are set aside to be the offering to God. But we are also a blessing for the world. By being the Church we are being fitted to serve the world in graciousness and truth.

We are taken, blessed, and then broken. Jesus is broken on the cross. The cry of desolation: Eloi, eloi, lema sabachthani; 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' shows Christ entering into the very depths of human experience. Jesus is broken as he carries the sins of the world. It is in being crucified that God shows how far God is willing to go out of love for this world. We are called to do the same. It is so easy, when people seem to not respond to what we are saying to turn around and turn our backs to the world and shut out the world. Rather we are to be broken out of love for this world.

We are taken, blessed, broken and then shared out for this world. Here we can do big things and little things. There are those who do big things. There are those who, for example, set up shelters for the homeless. And that is good. Then there are those who do small things. Like getting their housebound neighbour's shopping on a regular basis. Or, there was a parish priest who helped a man shave every day for years. Just a small thing, but vital. And these small acts gradually change the world we live in into a better place.

We as Church are taken, blessed, broken and shared out. We show who we are in the sacrament of Holy Communion and how our lives are shaped. God shapes us and remakes us and enables us to live deeper lives. Amen.