

# **Breaking Bread**

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*There is recent news that Chinese police have blockaded a Tibetan monastery, putting 2,500 monks under house arrest at the Kirti Buddhist monastery in the Aba county of Sichuan province. Tibetan exiles said armed police surrounded the complex last Tuesday and refused to allow monks to enter or leave.*

*The International Campaign for Tibet said hundreds of residents gathered outside Kirti last Tuesday because of fear that the authorities would forcibly remove monks for a “patriotic education” campaign after the self-immolation of a young lama. Citing exile sources, it was alleged that security forces beat protesters and unleashed dogs on the crowd as they forced their way through to the monastery, surrounding it and preventing up to 2,500 monks from leaving.*

*However, in an article in the Global Times, it was reported that “Chinese police intervened to control the lamas that had stirred up trouble.” Chinese state media have confirmed reports of clashes between monks and police at the monastery, but deny it has been blockaded. An article released by the Xinhua state news agency (on its news wire) reported that believers and vehicles were freely entering and monks could be seen outside. The report was headlined, “Life normal in Tibetan Buddhist monastery in south-west China.”*

*The Dalai Lama warned late last week that the situation could turn “explosive.” Beijing accuses the Dalai Lama of seeking to split Tibet from the rest of China, while the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader says he seeks only meaningful autonomy. Aba is one of many areas that lies outside Tibet but has a large Tibetan population.*

*Tibetan Buddhism, a faith of peace and tolerance, is at the center of this modern day controversy.* It’s the newsletter headline that grabs my eye. In the midst of obvious conflict, violence, and the isolating of people who long only for peaceful coexistence, the newspaper says, “Life normal in Tibetan Buddhist monastery in south-west China.”

I wonder what the conflicting news reports out of Jerusalem would have been if print media were possible? “Criminal put to death.” “False prophet full of beans.” “Blasphemer blasted.” “Long live Caesar.” That’s one version, isn’t it?

But what of this other version presented to us by Cleopas and the unnamed disciple on the road. “Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. And besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 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. 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.”

I wonder which voices you listen to when you read about the conflict in Tibet? Do you sit with those advocating a unified China that includes the people of Tibet? Do you sit with the monks in their persecution and long for a free and peaceful Tibetan nation? Which news you read might skew the way you believe, and which way you believe might impact the way you think about any number of issues from world trade to Buddhist religion.

I wonder which voice reigns in your life when you read this story of discipleship in Luke? Is it merely a story from history in which the people in charge of the press get to say, “We killed a criminal today” or “justice was served as we stopped this revolutionary movement in its tracks”? Is Jerusalem just another overrun city like Kirti where the people with the weapons get to make the rules? Is that what human reality is all about? Are these disciples on the road fleeing from the same kind of restricted lifestyle as those monks in Sichuan?

Or does this story move beyond history to see with the eyes of the heart that Rev. Murawski suggested to us last week? Is this not just a telling of facts, if facts at all, but rather a testimony of the human condition and the place of faith in it? Which way you read the scriptures might skew the way you believe, and which way you believe might impact the way you think about any number of issues from the modern role of the Christian community, to the costs and joys of discipleship that Jesus invites us to, to the very existence of the Christian religion worldwide.

“But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”

Have you ever hoped against hope and had your hopes dashed? Have you ever dreamed a beautiful dream and been shattered by the reality that fairy tales don’t come true, it didn’t happen to you, even though you stayed young at heart? Have you ever hurt so much you didn’t know whether you could live through the

physical or emotional or spiritual pain that wreaked havoc on your life? Have you ever walked a lonely road away from your greatest aspirations, your source of inner strength, your own personal understanding of what the world is supposed to look like, what's supposed to happen next, the way things are supposed to be? Have you ever been desperate? Have you ever known the dark night of the soul in which you felt so far from God that the gap breach was irreparable?

The 16<sup>th</sup> century priest and mystic St. John of the Cross talks about it this way: ***A description of this suffering and pain, although in truth it transcends all description, is given by David, when he says: 'The lamentations of death compassed me about; the pains of hell surrounded me; I cried in my tribulation.' But what the sorrowful soul feels most in this condition is its clear perception, as it thinks, that God has abandoned it, and, in God's abhorrence of it, has flung it into darkness; it is a grave and piteous grief for it to believe that God has forsaken it. The soul feels very keenly the shadow of death and the lamentations of death and the pains of hell, which consist in its feeling itself to be without God, and chastised and cast out, and unworthy of God; and it feels that God is wroth with it (meaning angry or irate). All this is felt by the soul in this condition—yea, and more, for it believes that it is so with it forever.***

“But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”

Beloved, while much of the world looks upon this story as the history of a criminal who was put to death, either justly or unjustly, fairly or unfairly, by the Jews or by the Romans, by a mob or by the military, we who are gathered are invited to a different way of seeing. So we choose to see with the eyes of our heart and to taste and touch a tangible faith.

So with the eyes of your heart see this stranger who walks in the midst of our human condition; with the ears of your heart listen as he recites the ancient salvation history that was theirs and is ours:

The stranger told them of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses and Aaron. He told them of the promise to make a great nation and the subsequent descent into slavery; he told them of deliverance from Pharaoh and entrance into the promised land; he told them of angels and burning bushes and promises restated time and again every time the people walked in misery and needed new hope. He told them about how it is that when humanity chooses to walk in the way of the world, the way of power and alliances and politics and

muscle bound authority, God keeps coming back again and again and again saying "Come Home, Come Home, All who are weary come home."

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" He went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared. They didn't waste a minute. They were up and on their way back to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and their friends gathered together, talking away: "It's really happened! The Master has been raised up. Then the two went over everything that happened on the road and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.

Seeing with the eyes of history, we see a criminal put to death. Seeing with the eyes of faith, we see a resurrected savior; seeing with the eyes of our hearts, we see the possibility that our hopes can be realized, our dreams can be actualized, our pain can be comforted and healed, our havoc can turn to harmony, our despair can rise up to rejoicing, the very dark night of our soul in which we feel the absence of God Almighty can awaken to a dawn as light and as powerful as that first Easter day.

Which way do you see it? Which way do you read it? Which way do you live it? Those are questions for coming days.

When the powers of the world and the hounds of hell are upon you, whether you are an imprisoned and oppressed Buddhist monk or a neighbor down the road, there is always a greater truth that prevails. For us who call ourselves Christian, it is not "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel," but this, "We have seen him! He is Risen! Christ is Risen!

Be at peace, and be in touch, will you?