

Known in the Breaking of Bread: A Protestant View

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Introduction

MEAL STORIES, holy and common, in Luke-Acts have drawn considerable attention from scholars in recent years. At least one scholar interprets the Lukan meals as allusions to the Eucharist, noting the similarities in Jesus' breaking of bread with the disciples.¹ This paper will argue the opposite: The paradigm of meals in Luke-Acts is the story of the feeding of the five thousand in Luke 9, which is non-Eucharistic in nature. This paper will examine four related meal passages to show that they are all linked to one another, both in sentence structure and in theme. Jesus' identity and presence among his disciples is a central concern. The disciples' understanding of Jesus' identity changes as events unfold in Luke-Acts. An emphasis on clarifying his identity gives way to a need to continue reminding his disciples of his presence among them, especially after his resurrection and in the formational days of the early Church. This paper will propose that, in the narrative of Luke-Acts, the disciples came to understand certain meals as experiences in which they are reminded of Jesus' identity and experience his ongoing presence in their community. The association of the meals with the experience of Christ's presence has already been noted in John Paul Heil's book, *Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts*.² This paper will explore in more detail the connection Heil makes and propose an even stronger link than Heil does.

¹ Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 83.

² John Paul Heil, *Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999).

Jesus' Presence and Identity in the Feeding of the Five Thousand

The feeding of the five thousand pericope in Luke holds a significance not always appreciated by the casual reader. This pericope presents meal elements repeated later in various passages throughout Luke-Acts. In all cases, the living presence of Jesus is a theme the author strongly emphasizes. In the narrative, participants recognize the presence of Jesus through the experience of certain common meals: After the bread is broken, the presence of and truth about Jesus, which were always a reality, seem to become clearer to those who partake.

The feeding of the five thousand in Luke 9:10–17 is a model for such meals. The pericope is immediately preceded by a passage in which Herod himself questions Jesus' identity. Herod has heard stories about Jesus. The disciples seem to have some knowledge of the same stories in 9:18. Much confusion surrounded Jesus' identity. Some claimed he was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Others theorized that prophecies concerning the return of Elijah had been fulfilled. Still others surmised that an ancient prophet had been brought back to life. Having beheaded the Baptist, Herod had eliminated in his own mind one of the theories being offered. The scene Luke describes is one of a public groping with the identity of a man who suddenly casts out demons, heals the sick, and preaches good news of the kingdom of God. Jesus' identity has become an important issue in the minds of the people and their king.

The feeding of the five thousand follows immediately, in some ways a response to Herod's curiosity. The Lukan story follows the Markan account in many respects. There are a few distinguishing elements of the Lukan story. Luke alone places this account in Bethsaida. It is interesting to note that Jesus pronounces a woe on Bethsaida in 10:13, claiming Tyre and Sidon would have come to repentance had they witnessed the mighty works done in Bethsaida. The proximity to the feeding passage leads one to believe this is a reference to it. In other words, this meal *should have clarified Jesus' identity* for those who participated in it. This is the very point Luke is trying to make in the feeding story.

Luke follows Mark in beginning the story with a short retreat for the disciples, who have just returned from a missionary journey. Matthew has Jesus withdraw out of fear of Herod. Luke alone includes Jesus' healing and preaching about the kingdom. Luke is careful to place this story squarely in the context of Jesus' ongoing ministry activity.

Beyond these unique aspects, Luke changes little from the Markan text besides word order. The disciples feel they can feed the crowd only if they

can buy more food. Jesus takes the five loaves and two fish and asks the disciples to seat the crowd. He blesses and breaks the bread and passes the food out to the disciples. Luke's version follows the Markan version very closely in the critical verbs of this passage in verse 16: λαβὼν (took); εὐλόγησεν (blessed); κατέκλασεν (broke). Matthew matches Luke on the first two words mentioned, but has κλάσαζ in the third instance. This may have been the way meals were typically started in Palestine at this time. There is no doubt that these words carried no special *symbolic* meaning in and of themselves to Luke. Later we will see how other meals that do not bear the same meaning as this one, and the Eucharist scene in chapter 22 still uses these same words. The meaning that sets these meals apart is the experience of Jesus' presence and, at least in Luke, a clearer sense of his identity. John Paul Heil notes that as the disciples watched Jesus feed the crowd with a small amount of food in this way they would have been reminded of the stories in 1 Kings 17:7–16 and 2 Kings 4:42–44, where Elijah and Elisha also multiplied food in a similar manner. The fact that five thousand people were fed in this instance would lead the disciples to believe that someone even greater than Elijah was with them.³ Whether the disciples actually recalled the stories of Elijah and Elisha or not, the question is whether the readers of the gospels would have recalled the stories. Some observers believe this was the case.

The argument being set forth in this study is that the miracle in this pericope is not for those who ate the food, but for the disciples. This passage is immediately followed by verses 18–22, in which Jesus asks the disciples about his identity. After the disciples tell Jesus what others have said, Peter confesses his conviction that Jesus is the Messiah. Peter must be saying this on behalf of the rest of the disciples because Jesus orders all of them not to reveal this truth to anyone. He goes on to further clarify his identity as the Messiah by saying that the Messiah must suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. The implication is that the Messiah must suffer, die, and be raised because the Scriptures foretold it. This is the first time in the gospel where the disciples have a moment of clarity concerning Jesus' identity. I. Howard Marshall notes of the preceding feeding pericope: "In its context in Luke, it prepares for the confession scene which follows, and constitutes a decisive revelation of Jesus to the disciples."⁴ Richard J. Dillon notes this arrangement of meal and passion prediction,

³ Ibid., 63

⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke, A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 357.

saying the feeding is Jesus' way of "sharing his mission and destiny with them."⁵ Robert C. Tannehill affirms this analysis of the author's purpose by saying that this is a very suitable place for the author to show the point where the disciples recognized Jesus as Messiah.⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmyer agrees: "[T]he multiplication of the loaves and fish in this Lukan context prepares for the admission Peter is to make about Jesus."⁷ By juxtaposing these two pericopes, Luke makes the following point: Jesus is known to his disciples as the Messiah in the sharing of a common meal.

Some observers argue that according to the narrative, this meal is a holy meal, an early version of the Eucharist Jesus later formalized in chapter 22. For the purposes of this paper, the term "Eucharist" or "Eucharistic" refers to a meal consisting of bread and a cup, celebrated by the community of Jesus' followers, where the elements have a symbolic/sacramental value as the body and blood of Jesus. The community celebrates this meal as a remembrance of Jesus. Eugene LaVerdiere argues that the ten meals Jesus participates in during his ministry in Luke represent the "unfolding" of the Eucharist. Each meal seems to accentuate a different facet of meaning for the Eucharist.⁸ LaVerdiere assigns a variety of meal settings to a similar purpose, something Luke probably did not intend. Fitzmyer supports LaVerdiere's argument, adding, "The use of the Eucharistic formulae in the feeding accounts starts a trajectory of Christian interpretation in which the Eucharist is being prefigured."⁹ The diversity of settings seems to argue against his view. Andrew McGowan points out an implicit assumption in LaVerdiere's argument: that the Eucharist "was a fixed pattern of celebration basically comparable to contemporary Catholic liturgy."¹⁰ McGowan contends that such a pattern cannot be demonstrated from Luke-Acts itself or within the Lukan community.

Jesus was not instituting a holy meal. This did not happen in the context of the Passover. It was a common meal involving the staples of the diet typical to first-century Jews. A similar argument could be made

⁵ Richard J. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word: Tradition and Composition in Luke 24* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1978), 197.

⁶ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 1, *The Gospel According to Luke*, ed. Robert W. Funk (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 219.

⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 764.

⁸ LaVerdiere, *Eucharist*, 83.

⁹ Fitzmyer, *Gospel*, 764.

¹⁰ Andrew McGowan, "The Breaking of the Bread: The Development of the Eucharist According to the Acts of the Apostles: A Review Article" (review of Eugene LaVerdiere, *Breaking of the Bread*), *Worship* 73 (1999): 474.

concerning the Eucharist in chapter 22, but the food in that instance had clear religious overtones, being elements of the Passover meal. In addition, the Eucharist in chapter 22 seems to envelop the actual Passover meal, whereas the feeding of the five thousand is the meal. The only similarities seem to be the blessing, breaking, and passing out of bread, and even those have striking dissimilarities, as we will see. The point of the Eucharist in chapter 22 seems to be the remembrance of Jesus. The point in the narrative of the feeding of the five thousand is to clarify for the disciples Jesus' identity as Messiah. More will be said concerning the difference between the two meals next.

The Experience of Jesus' Presence in the Eucharist of Luke 22

The Passover meal depicted in Luke 22:15–20 has significant verbal similarities to the feeding of the five thousand in chapter 9. This is one of the main reasons scholars have often concluded that the feeding of the five thousand is Eucharistic in nature. Jesus “took” (λάβων) bread and “gave” (ἔδωκεν) it to the disciples. However, the differences greatly outweigh the similarities between the two stories. In 22:19, Jesus asks his disciples to remember him through this sacrament. In chapter 9, he performs the miracle to help his disciples recognize him, which he also does in the Emmaus pericope. In chapter 9, Jesus has the disciples pass out food in a meal that holds absolutely no religious meaning to the crowd; in chapter 22 Jesus feeds the disciples in a meal that had both historical meaning and would come to have sacramental meaning for the early Church. In chapter 9 Jesus passes out fish; in chapter 22 he gives new meaning to the third cup of the Passover meal. While the fish may have been a classical symbol of the Eucharist, there are few observers who feel a Eucharistic tradition with fish is the basis for the feeding of the five thousand or the meal with the eleven disciples in Luke 24.

At best, one meal alludes to the other. Since the feeding of the five thousand comes earlier, it is much easier to understand the Last Supper as an allusion to it, rather than the other way around. One could argue that the feeding of the five thousand is a foreshadowing of the Eucharist. However, this paper will argue that it more likely foreshadows the meal stories in chapter 24. John Nolland cuts to the heart of the meaning of this meal for Luke by showing that the image of body and blood independently point to Jesus' coming death.¹¹ Nolland follows the logic of Heinz Schürmann, who claims that since the meal separated the bread and

¹¹ John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 1053.

the cup, Luke did not intend the reader to interpret them as interrelated.¹² Marshall finds this argument lacking, saying that if the gospel narrative presents them as part of a meal, then the “early Church regarded ‘body and blood’ as a pair and understood the two sayings in light of each other.”¹³ Marshall is right on this point, at least in speaking about chapter 22. Nevertheless, between the gospel and the second chapter of Acts, Luke presents the reader with four different yet related meals, each with tremendous theological significance for the identity of Jesus, where bread is explicitly broken. Only one explicitly mentions a cup, and two others explicitly mention fish. The point is, the breaking of bread is much larger for the narrative than its context in Luke 22:19. It is much more plausible to understand Luke incorporating the breaking of bread in the Passover/Last Supper tradition than it is to understand those four meals as Eucharistic. If this is true, the feeding of the five thousand is not meant to be Eucharistic. It is very plausible to assert that the Eucharist story in Luke incorporated the breaking of the bread from Luke 9:16, then added the element of wine from the Passover tradition. Indeed, as David Brown states, “he deliberately adopted the customary breaking of the loaf as a foretelling of the judgment and deliverance soon to come.”¹⁴ It would be much more awkward to explain how the feeding in 9:16 was an echo of a story that comes toward the end of the gospel, and that it does away with part of the Eucharistic meal, substituting fish in its place.

Another way of understanding this meal in the context of the narrative is as a replacement for sacrifices offered in the temple. Bruce Chilton argues that Jesus’ entry into the temple, which was undoubtedly for the purposes of purification, was unsuccessful. Chilton compares Jesus to other groups like the Essenes and some Pharisaical groups who saw the temple cult as irreversibly corrupted under the leadership of that time.¹⁵ Sacrifices were not acceptable to God when offered in an impure environment. Thus, in the synoptics, the Eucharist is symbolic of the sacrifices no longer offered there. The wine represents the blood poured from the animal, and the flesh is represented by the bread, which was divided at the time of sacrifice.¹⁶ How Jesus identifies this sacrifice with himself in Luke is another matter. Chilton says the commandment to remember Jesus through the

¹² Heinz Schürmann, *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den synoptischen Evangelien; Beiträge* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1968), 107.

¹³ Marshall, *Greek*, 803.

¹⁴ David Brown, “Breaking of the Bread,” *Theology* 75 (1972): 480.

¹⁵ Bruce Chilton, *A Feast of Meanings: Eucharistic Theologies from Jesus through Johanne Circles* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 70.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

meal in verse 19 is a further theological development by the early Church. He states that in the earliest form, which exists in Jesus identifying the wine and bread as blood and body, the sacrifices one gives to God are meant. In this scenario, Jesus has taken the place of the temple. The only appropriate place to offer symbolic sacrifices to God is in the Eucharistic meal.¹⁷

Few will argue against the existence of more than one level of tradition in the Lukan version of the Last Supper. If so, then one could easily connect the nature of the early tradition described by Chilton, apart from significant Eucharistic reinterpretation, with the feeding of the five thousand and the common meals of the early Church described in Acts 2.

Two important narrative questions must be addressed at this point. First, if Jesus had replaced the temple by the time of the Last Supper, what was his relationship to it at the feeding of the five thousand? How are the two meals related? Again, if the feeding of the five thousand is the paradigm for meals in Luke-Acts, then his presence as a replacement for the temple builds on the meaning of his presence in the breaking of bread in chapter 9. It is a further development of that theme. The addition of Eucharistic phrases in 22:19 does not alter this development.

Second, if Jesus replaces the temple for the disciples, why are they found in the temple on a daily basis in Acts 2? One must keep in mind that the temple remained an important place of ministry for the Church in Acts 2. If Jesus considered the temple impure, it would make sense that his followers would continue his efforts to purify the temple. A possible extension of this effort to avoid participating in the cultic activity of an impure temple may have been the common meal they enjoyed. This meal, which consisted of the broken bread and possibly the cup, could easily be understood as an alternative to the sacrifices offered by faithful Jews outside the Church.

Some note must also be made of the textual variants in this passage. All extant Greek manuscripts except D have the "longer" reading, which includes verses 19b–20. The sequence of the meal in those manuscripts is cup–bread–cup. Manuscript D and others have a "shorter" version in which verses 19b–20 are lacking. In those versions, the Eucharist simply consists of the cup. Some observers hold that the shorter version of the text is most original to Luke because shorter readings are generally favored in New Testament scholarship, and because there is a telltale level of agreement between verses 19b–20 and 1 Corinthians 11:24b–25.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid., 71.

¹⁸ Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: American Bible Society, 1994), 150.

This would suggest that verses 19b–20 is an interpolation by an editor who wanted to preserve the Pauline formula for the Last Supper in this passage. However, a greater number of observers feel that similarities between verses 19b–20 can be explained when one considers the author's familiarity with the Pauline formula. The wide variety of manuscripts containing verses 19b–20 also argues in favor of the "longer" version.¹⁹

Brown says Jesus intended to reassure his disciples of the divine purpose present in his impending demise.²⁰ The repetition of this meal was to remind them of the saving effect his death had on those who follow him. Brown says, "They were able to associate the bread and wine with him because in some way which they did not then fully understand, their breaking and pouring represented actions which he said he would suffer on their behalf."²¹

LaVerdiere notes that Luke has Jesus take this opportunity to address the economic chasm between the rich and the poor.²² This almost certainly did not pertain to the situation of the disciples at the time, for in the narrative they had left everything to follow Jesus. LaVerdiere also notes the way Luke gave a universal meaning to a meal clearly meant for the disciples by associating it with a new covenant based on Jesus' sacrifice of himself.²³ Whether or not one agrees with LaVerdiere's understanding, he points to a significant aspect of this meal for Luke: It is a farewell discourse, and the teachings, along with the meal, are meant to embody the presence of Jesus after he is gone.

Resurrection Meals of Presence

The Meal at Emmaus

While LaVerdiere argues that all the meals in Luke are Eucharistic in nature, the only meal Jesus explicitly gives such meaning is the Last Supper in chapter 22. The other place in Luke where Jesus' presence is known to his disciples during the breaking of bread and fish is in the Resurrection appearances to the disciples in Emmaus and Jerusalem in chapter 24. The part of this story pertaining to this study revolves around the language used concerning the bread. Despite having walked with Jesus the distance from Jerusalem, and despite his explanation of the scriptural evidence that

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Brown, "Bread," 480.

²¹ Ibid., 482.

²² LaVerdiere, *Eucharist*, 85.

²³ Ibid. 91.

²⁴ Robert Karris, "Luke 24:13–35," *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 57–61.

the Messiah should have suffered, died, and returned from the dead, the disciples fail to recognize Jesus. Again, his identity is the issue.

The disciples do not recognize Jesus until he breaks the bread and passes it out to them. After that, his identity becomes instantly clear. The disciples are surprised that they did not recognize him sooner. This is a clear continuation of the pattern established in the feeding of the five thousand: Jesus breaks bread and fish, passes them out, and his identity becomes clear to his disciples. Robert Karris notes, "they recognize Jesus because he shares food with them."²⁴ The argument against this view is that no fish are involved in the Emmaus story. However, the author undoubtedly intended to link this story with the appearance to follow, a story where fish are involved.

William S. Kurz notes the clear double entendre present in this passage, pointing out that both the Eucharist and his ongoing presence are at issue here.²⁵ This view is supported by Nolland, who notes that the language in 24:30 is much more similar to 9:15–16 than it is to 22:19. However, Nolland claims that 9:16 was intended to "evoke" thought of the Eucharist in 22:19. For that reason, Nolland warns against drawing too strong of a "distinction" between the two passages.²⁶ Nolland does not mean, however, that the Emmaus meal is a Eucharist; "rather, Luke wants to make the point that the Christians of his day were able to have the living Lord made known to them in the Eucharistic celebration in a manner that was at least analogous to the experience of the Emmaus disciples."²⁷ The point for the disciples at Emmaus is that Jesus' identity is known in the breaking of the bread, which is an echo of the Eucharist. Marshall agrees with this assessment, adding, "It was because Jesus had appeared at meal times that the Church expected his presence at the Lord's Supper."²⁸ Hans Deiter Betz concurs, stating that the "common meal is elevated to such an extent that it is thought of as the principle occasion where the resurrected Jesus becomes manifest."²⁹

Some scholars have proposed that the disciples recognized Jesus because of a particular manner in which Jesus broke the bread. Georges Gander proposes that Jesus had broken bread in a signature way even before the Last Supper, and that the disciples recognized his distinct

²⁵ William S. Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 71.

²⁶ Nolland, *Luke*, 1206.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Marshall, *Greek*, 898.

²⁹ Hans Deiter Betz, "The Origin and Nature of Christian Faith according to the Emmaus Legend," *Interpretation* 23 (1969): 32–46.

method.³⁰ This is not altogether implausible. Yet it is difficult to reconcile this claim with the fact that Jesus was recognized in the next pericope as he ate fish, something he himself had not broken.

Alfred Plummer also notes a difference in the verb tenses used in the Eucharist pericope and the other meals mentioned so far. In 9:16, the breaking and passing out of the bread is described with *κατέκλασεν* and *ἔδιδου*, verbs in the aorist and imperfect tense, respectively. This gives one the image of Jesus repeatedly giving bread in the scene. This shift from the aorist to the imperfect is also present in 24:30, where the author uses *κλάσας ἐπέδιδου*. Plummer notes that neither the gospels nor Paul employ the imperfect when speaking about Jesus passing out the bread in the Eucharist passages.³¹ On this basis, Plummer also regards the Emmaus meal as not Eucharistic in nature.

C. F. Evans raises other questions about associating this meal too strongly with the Eucharist. He notes that the two disciples in this story were not present at the Last Supper. If, in the narrative, this meal was meant to evoke images of the Last Supper in the minds of these two disciples, they could have only understood those images secondhand from accounts they heard over the weekend from the eleven.³² This is an unlikely scenario.

In summary, the meal with the disciples at Emmaus followed the pattern clearly demonstrated in the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus' identity as Messiah was recognized in the breaking and distribution of food. While this passage had clear echoes of the Eucharist meal instituted in chapter 22, it is not a Eucharist meal in itself. Rather, it is because Jesus' presence was recognized in community meals that the disciples expected to experience his presence in the Eucharist.

The Other Half of the Emmaus Appearance

There is very little doubt among scholars that the appearance of Jesus at Emmaus and his appearance to the disciples in the next passages are to be read as one story. As the disciples from Emmaus are reporting their experience to the eleven, Jesus appears in their midst. There is no break between these stories, though one appears in many translations. If so, then one can argue that the meal that helps Jesus' disciples recognize his identity is only half over. The second course is about to begin.

³⁰ Georges Gander, *L'Evangile pour les étrangers du monde: commentaire de l'Evangile selon Luc* (Lausanne: s.n., 1986), 1021.

³¹ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1922), 551.

³² C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (London: SCM, 1990), 913.

When he appears, the disciples' first inclination is that his ghost has appeared to them. Though Jesus quickly attempts to put that theory to rest, showing them his hands and feet, they remain in a state of disbelief (ἀπιστούτων; 24:41). He asks for something to eat, and the disciples supply him with the other half of the meal, which helped them to recognize him in chapter 9: a piece of fish. After this point, Jesus explains to them why it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and die, and so on. At this point Jesus makes a statement about the role of the Messiah. He had already established his identity when he participated in their communal meal.

Many commentators draw a distinction between the Emmaus meal and the meal with the eleven. Most recognize a connection between this passage and the appearance of Jesus with bread and fish at the shore in John 21. There is almost a consensus that these two passages reflect an older tradition that Luke and John have alluded to in these two appearances. This part of the story, along with the Emmaus story, is a Lukan formulation, building on the tradition used by Luke and John. No mention of fish occurs in the resurrection appearances of Matthew. In John 21:13, Jesus is the host who passes out the fish. In Luke he receives it. Furthermore, in Ignatius's *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, the Lukan phrase "For a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (3:21) appears without any reference to the fish.

Some wonder if this earlier tradition was Eucharistic in nature.³³ John Dominic Crossan argues this is an early form of the Eucharist, a meal where Jesus assumes the role of both the master who blesses the bread (at Emmaus) and the servant who distributes it.³⁴ Crossan also says the meaning of this meal evolved from a "postresurrectional confession of Jesus' continued presence at the ritualized meals of the believing community" to a Eucharist for Church leadership.³⁵ One could question his use of "Eucharist" for both the meal in chapter 22 and this meal in chapter 24. Crossan does not explain how the meal in chapter 24 is "Eucharistic" besides noting the textual similarities between the two stories that have been noted above. However, characterizing this meal as "Eucharistic" is problematic. No words of the institution appear, there is no bread or cup, and the meal involves an experience of Jesus' immediate presence, not a remembrance of him.

Crossan also distinguishes Jesus' eating of the fish from the breaking of the bread by pointing out the transfer of roles from host to guest.³⁶ Dillon

³³ Marshall, *Greek*, 903.

³⁴ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 402.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 404.

agrees, pointing out that this meal establishes continuity between the many meal stories in Luke where he is a guest for a meal.³⁷ Dillon contrasts this meal with the meals where Jesus breaks bread with the disciples and passes it out. His view is preferable. Crossan overlooks that in Emmaus, where the two disciples host a meal in the place where they were staying, Jesus is their guest, though they travel along together. Moreover, in the eating of the fish, the disciples again supply him with fish. It is a communal meal the disciples have enjoyed in which he is their guest, and during which his identity is recognized. Even Marshall, who denies the connection between this meal and the feeding of the five thousand, admits that the purpose of this meal for Luke is “to stress the reality of his presence with them.”³⁸ His presence would be irrelevant if his identity were unclear to his disciples.

He is not a normal guest, nevertheless. As in many other meals depicted by Luke, Jesus is an honored guest. How else could one imagine the people would receive him when they consider him to be John the Baptist or Elijah or Moses, or one of the prophets raised from the dead? In modern culture, he is like the visiting priest who is invited to a meal and asked to pray a blessing on the food. Crossan also claims Jesus has turned the idea of an honored guest on its head.³⁹ While Crossan maintains that the one who blesses and breaks the bread is usually the master or host, he recognizes that Jesus, who would have sat in a place of honor, as a master or an honored guest, performs the duty usually reserved for a servant, a housewife, or someone in a less honored place at the table. He states, “Far from reclining and being served, Jesus himself serves the meal, serves, like any housewife, the same meal to all including himself.”⁴⁰ Crossan’s argument does not allow for the very common practice by hosts in first-century Palestine to parcel out food to the guests in a manner of their choosing. Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh cite many instances in Greco-Roman literature where a host is depicted doling out food to guests in a manner corresponding to their social status.⁴¹ As a host, Jesus goes against the common practice and hands the same meal to each guest. In this instance, he does none of those things. Crossan’s claim that Jesus challenged the culturally conditioned roles of guest-host is not founded, at least in this instance. Jesus was a guest when he ate fish with the eleven disciples in Luke 24. This is one more reason

³⁷ Dillon, *Eye-Witnesses*, 291.

³⁸ Marshall, *Greek*, 903.

³⁹ Crossan, *Historical*, 404.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 368.

why it should not be disconnected from the meal at Emmaus, where he did break the bread as an honored guest.

One last point should be noted here. There seems to be a transition from the Lukan meal stories of Jesus' presence to a meal story of joy and teaching in Acts. An emphasis on experiencing the bodily presence of Jesus and recognizing his identity in the breaking of bread is transformed into a continued experience of the joy of Jesus' presence through fellowship with his apostles. Just as the disciples find joy in their disbelief (24:41) in this pericope, the early Church ἀγαλλιᾷσεται "rejoices exceedingly" in the community meal (Acts 2:46). In the following discussion of the pericope from Acts, a link will be proposed with the meal stories in Luke. The story in Luke 24 of Jesus' appearance to the eleven disciples is the pivotal meal in that the joy of the bodily presence of Jesus gives way to joy of his continued presence through the ongoing work of God in the community through the apostles.

In summary, the narrative treats the story of Jesus' disciples eating a common meal with him after his death as a powerful experience of his presence, a time when his identity became clear. For this reason, Luke juxtaposes the touching of his hands and the eating of the fish. Special prominence is attributed by Peter in Acts 10:41 to the strength of the witness given by those who were privileged by God to share this meal with Jesus. Those who ate with him identified him clearly as the Lord they had known before his death, and they experienced his presence among them in the common meal. The relationship of this passage to the feeding of the five thousand takes on a new meaning for the narrative when viewed in this light.

Meals of Jesus' Presence in Acts

The pattern of meals in which the apostles experience Jesus' presence continues in the book of Acts, though, as stated before, some shifts appear. Heil notes, "The reference to the communal meals of the Jerusalem believers as 'the breaking of the bread' means that they are continuing the special meal fellowship Jesus modeled for them by his own breaking of the bread."⁴² The bodily presence of Jesus is no longer an issue because he has ascended to heaven. Recognition of his identity is no longer an issue because Jesus rose from the dead in Luke and opened up the minds of the disciples to understand his identity in a way that was impossible up to that point. The preaching of the disciples in Acts demonstrates the apostles' very clear understanding of Jesus' identity.

⁴² Heil, *Meal Stories*, 237.

Though these two issues have become less of a concern in Acts, the emerging Church continues to experience his presence in communal meals. While evidence of this continuity is not easily identified as in Luke, it does exist. The key to understanding the narrative link between the meal passages in Luke and the passage in Acts is in the emotion of those dining. In Acts 2:46, a related meal story appears in which the Church senses a joy similar to that experienced by the eleven disciples when Jesus appeared to them in Luke 24. Though different words are used in these two passages to express this happiness, nevertheless the ideas are very similar. In addition, the words used to describe the breaking of the bread are very similar to the words used in the feeding of the five thousand and other Lukan passages. A more detailed look at this related meal story in Acts will clarify this point.

Community Meals in the Early Church

The portrait Luke paints of the early Church is one of community and wonder. The teaching ministry of Jesus continues through the teaching of the apostles. Equally as narrated is the experience of the communal meal in which the joy of Jesus' presence is felt in the breaking of bread. The Church breaks bread κατ' οἶκον, "at home," an experience that made them ἀγαλλιάσει, "rejoice exceedingly" (Acts 2:46). As mentioned above, the link to the passage with the eleven disciples in Luke 24 is the similar feeling of joy the disciples had when Jesus was present in body. For Heil, the joyful experience of common meals by the early Church celebrated the resumption of the table fellowship when Jesus appeared and ate with the disciples in Luke 24.⁴³ The Church continued to experience that presence and joy not only in the teaching and wonders performed by the apostles, but also in the breaking of bread in each others' homes.

The language used in this story is similar to that used in the feeding of the five thousand. The breaking of the bread in 2:42 is κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου, which is the exact phrase used in Luke 24:35 when Jesus broke bread in Emmaus. The verb is the same in Acts 2:46, though the sentence structure requires the present active participle κλώντέζ.

In addition to the parallel in language described above, this story also parallels the joy (χαρᾶς) experienced by the disciples in Luke 24:41. The word used in Acts 2:46 to describe this joy is ἀγαλλιάσει. Kurz is one of the few scholars who makes note of this phrase, labeling it a "fruit of the Spirit."⁴⁴ Although the two words are different, the similarity of the emotions they express is too strong to overlook.

⁴³ Ibid., 243.

⁴⁴ William S. Kurz, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1983), 27.

Again, this meal is not to be confused with the Eucharist, though it does share the common element of disciples breaking bread. C. K. Barrett emphasizes that these were common meals with simple elements from everyday life, not symbolic, as the Eucharist clearly was.⁴⁵ But Barrett sees the “rejoicing” of the early Church in this verse as “eschatological; salvation was at hand.”⁴⁶ Johannes Munck concurs, adding that these meals “are only for the baptized.”⁴⁷ David John Williams distinguishes between the mention of “the bread” in 2:42 and “bread” without the definite article in 2:46.⁴⁸ Williams suggests that 2:42 refers to the Eucharist because of the definite article τοῦ. Williams agrees with Barrett that the meal in 2:46 is a common meal enjoyed by the Church. It is to be distinguished from the meal described in 2:42.⁴⁹ F. F. Bruce also identifies the meal mentioned in 2:42 as Eucharistic in nature.⁵⁰ Bruce seems to make no distinction between the meals in 2:42 and the meals in 2:46. Though he acknowledges that the meals in 2:46 occur in the homes of the people of the early Church, Bruce seems to indicate that the meals in 2:42 became impractical in the temple, and the Eucharistic meals were transferred to the homes of the believers.⁵¹ LaVerdiere agrees, claiming that every meal in Luke-Acts where bread is broken has been transformed into a meal associated with the Eucharist.⁵² That view is not held by Williams or Barrett, both of whom see the meals in 2:46 as non-symbolic in nature.

Hans Conzelmann bridges the gap between these two positions by saying that although Luke means to describe “ordinary” meals in these instances, he does not make a distinction between the common meals and the Eucharistic meals, which the Church certainly celebrated with regularity.⁵³ If this is so, then the joy the early Church experienced in the ongoing presence of Jesus through the community and apostolic ministry at both these meals corresponds to the joy felt by the disciples at the meal stories in Luke 24. LaVerdiere comments, “This was not just the breaking and sharing of bread, but Jesus’ breaking of bread and Jesus’ sharing

⁴⁵ C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Shorter Commentary* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2002), 35.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Johannes Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 22.

⁴⁸ John David Williams, *Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 60.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁵⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 132.

⁵¹ Ibid., 133.

⁵² LaVerdiere, *Eucharist*, 104.

⁵³ Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and Christopher R. Matthews, trans. James A. Limburg, Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 23.

of it as an expression of his person.”⁵⁴ Though Jesus is no longer present in body, his presence is still experienced through these meals and continues to bring joy to the Church.

In summary, the meals described in Acts 2:42 and 2:46 are difficult to distinguish from one another, whether one is Eucharistic in nature as opposed to the other. What is clear is that in the narrative the early Church continued to experience the joy of the presence of Jesus in these meals, a joy the disciples felt upon seeing his resurrected body. Strong similarities have been demonstrated between the words used to describe these meals and the words used to describe the meal at Emmaus. Indeed, Tannehill remarks, “The presence of the risen Christ at Emmaus may also suggest that the meals in Acts go beyond fellowship among believers to include communion with the risen Lord.”⁵⁵ This paper has argued that such a relationship is more than suggested by the narrative. Although his physical presence is but a memory at this point, the meals enjoyed by the early Church helped them remember and experience that presence in a new way through the ongoing ministry of the apostles and the fellowship enjoyed by the believers.

Other Unrelated Meal Stories

There are two other meal stories in Acts that follow a word structure similar to that found in the stories discussed so far in this paper. One is an account of a communal meal with Paul and a group of believers in Troas (20:11). This account is of a normal meal that would be eaten, not one imbued with the kind of special significance inherent in the stories described above. Any special sense of Jesus’ presence in this passage would be related to Paul’s apparent healing of Eutychus, an event somewhat reminiscent of the raising of Jairus’s daughter in Luke 8. The second is a meal Paul shared on the ship during his perilous trip to Rome. Though the breaking and blessing of bread are described in familiar words, this was a meal shared mostly with unconverted Roman soldiers and sailors. The occasion has little or no relation to the passages that have been discussed. What can be said about both these meals, though, is that, like the other meals mentioned in this paper, they allude to the Last Supper. The verbal agreement in the breaking of bread, and the fact that there are parallels between Paul’s life and the life of Jesus in Luke should not be overlooked.

⁵⁴ LaVerdiere, *Eucharist*, 104.

⁵⁵ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity*, 290.

Conclusion

In summary, a consistent pattern beginning with the feeding of the five thousand and on through the meals of the early Church in Acts 2 has been proposed. The point of breaking the bread in Luke 9 was to reveal Jesus' identity to the disciples so that they, unlike Herod and the rest of the Jews, would know the Messiah was present with them. The community remembered Jesus' ongoing presence and identity as one who died and rose again in their repeated celebration of the Eucharist. The breaking of bread present in other meals was associated with the Last Supper/Passover meal Jesus celebrated with his disciples before his death. A two-stage repetition of the breaking of the bread in Luke 9 occurs in Luke 24, where Jesus' presence is recognized both in the breaking of the bread and in a meal of fish. The early Church is reminded of Jesus' ongoing presence in their community as they ate and enjoyed fellowship over common meals in each others' homes and in the observance of the Eucharist. The joy of the early Church reflects the joy of the disciples as they realize Jesus is present in body with them three days after his death. While this paper certainly challenges some trends in recent scholarship concerning the Eucharist, it gives a much more plausible argument for understanding the breaking of the bread in Luke 9 as the prototype for the meals of presence enjoyed by Jesus' disciples in his life, death, resurrection, and the beginnings of the Church. **N V**

