

Sunday, May 8, 2011: Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Luke 24:13-35

At times I will again be struck by the smallness of the thing, of this bit of bread and sip of wine.

by [Ron Adams](#) in the [May 3, 2011](#) issue

"When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them."

(Luke 24:30)

A spoken word, a bit of bread, a sip of wine: in a world that is spinning out of control and out of whack, these things seem woefully inadequate. When congregations are dying, when membership is down, when we are edging toward a post-Christian culture, these things seem hopelessly passé.

What is our response to this world? If we turn to our texts, we read that these small things—the word, the bread and the wine—have the power to redeem and restore, to heal and embolden, to nurture and sustain, and to call human beings back to their best selves.

Peter was hardly the most likely candidate to preach the first post-resurrection sermon. It's true that he'd always been in the inner circle of the disciples, and so it might seem right that he'd become the public face of the Jesus movement. But at times he had failed, and failed spectacularly. When given the opportunity to stand with Jesus in his most difficult hour, Peter not only denied being his disciple: he denied knowing Jesus at all.

Yet now he was proclaiming the truth of Jesus to everyone who could hear, and his words "cut to the heart." His sermon reached into people's hearts and stirred them in their deepest being, creating a crisis that cried out for a response. "What should we do?" they asked. Repent, Peter told them. Be baptized in the name of Jesus. Receive the gift of the Spirit. They did, and 3,000 people joined Peter and his friends on the way of Jesus.

In this generation of marketing gurus and church growth experts, we tend to scrutinize Peter's message, looking for some formula to follow, some foolproof recipe for successful evangelism. We will not find a formula, but we can learn a lot from Peter here. He rooted his message in the scripture and in the stories of the Jewish people. He quoted the prophets. He made the connection between those tried-and-true things and current events in Jerusalem. He made the connection to the story of Jesus of Nazareth, who came and lived and died and was raised from the dead.

In short, Peter's was a solidly exegeted, theologically sophisticated, prophetic message—not the kind of new thing that sells books, but the standard that many of us preachers seek to meet. Yet it is difficult for many of us to imagine a sermon having this kind of power—power to cut to the quick, to call to repentance, to stir an audience in its place of deepest need. Is that because our imagination is too small? Or our faith?

As Luke tells it, two companions heard a similar sermon from Jesus, a sermon given in response to their small faith. They could not make sense of things, so Jesus sidled up to them and reviewed the history, interpreted recent events and revealed to them the truth about Jesus the Messiah. After all of that, these two erstwhile disciples almost let Jesus get away from them.

But their sense of hospitality came to the rescue, and they invited the eloquent stranger to spend the night in their home. The stranger took some bread in his hand, blessed it and broke it, and suddenly the two companions recognized Jesus and raced back to town to tell their friends that they'd met him.

Perhaps it was the manner in which he broke the bread, or the familiar way he blessed it. Perhaps something more mystical happened, some kind of transfiguration that made plain the identity of their guest. However it happened, Jesus was revealed and the faith of the two companions was nourished. This is why we continue the practice of eating the bread and drinking the cup: we trust that Christ is present with us in the celebration.

At times I will again be struck by the smallness of the thing, of this bit of bread and sip of wine. Isn't this too small to reveal anything about Jesus? I'll remind myself that I spend too much time brooding on all of the world's troubles: economic recession, environmental degradation, war and violence. I can neither ignore these woes nor make them go away. This is the world I inhabit. This is the world I am in but not of.

These are the huge and overwhelming circumstances that cry out for a Christian response.

Like Frodo Baggins, the unlikely hero of J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, I may feel dwarfed by all of the need. Who am I to even attempt to respond? I may wish for someone more heroic and powerful to work a miracle. But like Frodo, I must use what I've been given and trust in God to make them count.

A spoken word. A bit of bread. A sip of wine. Our texts insist there is a power here that calls people to repentance, that draws them to God and reveals the presence of Christ. There is power here too to feed and nourish a community.

I've only been given these small things to share with the world and the congregation. Bigger things might become objects of worship. They might make me proud, tempt me to trust in my ability to make everything right and even to try and save the world.

Instead, all I can do is try to be faithful by preaching, eating and drinking with sisters and brothers, and trusting that the Holy Spirit will use these things to bring healing and hope to the world.