

"What We Know, What We Share, What We Become"

Philippians 3:4b-11

Know, Share, Become

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Have you ever been on the New York City Subway? During the years I was a student at Union Theological Seminary I took the subway nearly every day. The seminary was on West 122nd Street, and I took the Number 1 Broadway local to get to my student pastor location at a little Presbyterian Church on West 57th Street. Other times, for a part-time job I had with a peace organization, I took the number 2 or 3 Broadway express all the way down to the World Trade Center and Wall Street.

The subway is an amazing way to travel because you can see all of the diversity of God's children in one short trip from one stop to the next: kids on the way home from Catholic school in their uniforms, important people dressed in business suits, orthodox Jewish men, Muslim women, European travelers, African immigrants, alcoholics, desperate beggars, the homeless, blue collar workers, tourists from Byron ... name any kind of people and you can and I'm sure that I've seen them on the New York City subway. Name any language you can and I'm sure that I've heard it on the subway.

But there's one small problem about enjoying all of that diversity - there's an unwritten rule that everyone follows. You know what an unwritten rule is, don't you? It's not written anywhere, it's not in the US Constitution, it's not posted on the subway platform, it's not taught in school. It's not written anywhere, but everyone knows it. The unwritten rule that governs life on the New York City subway is this: never look anyone in the eye. The unwritten rule leads to some awkward moments. Like during rush hour, when people are jammed together like sardines. Even then, when you are nose to nose with someone else, you do everything possible to avoid making eye contact. And so people bury their heads in newspapers, close their eyes and listen to their headphones, or stare at the advertisements - anything to avoid making contact with another person.

One boiling hot summer day during the heart of rush hour, with the passengers jammed in elbow to armpit, the train came to a sudden stop in the middle of the tunnel ... a breakdown. Everyone groaned with sweaty exasperation. But then a most amazing thing happened, the driver turned on the PA system and made an announcement. "Ladies and gentlemen, there's a breakdown just ahead of us in the tunnel. We're

going to be delayed for a few minutes. So while we're waiting why not introduce yourself to the people around you, and share a nice smile".

The result was incredible .. people started smiling and laughing and making eye contact. I had never seen it before, I didn't think it was possible, but there it was happening right in front of my eyes. All of the sudden, the normal barriers were down, and people we're finding out how much they had in common. It was a miracle!

But then the train began to move again, and that wonderful moment of contact and communion was lost, everyone retreated to their newspaper or went back to staring at the floor of the subway car.

Paul had a miracle moment like this, too. It didn't happen on a subway, but it did happen while he was traveling to Damascus. He shares his miracle moment with us in his letter to the Philippians, and he puts before us the idea that the miracle of a communion moment has a staying power that he won't retreat from. "*All I want*", he says, "*is to know Christ and to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and become like him in his death, in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life.*" [Philippians 3:10]

When we gather at the table we know of God's love for each one of us, and for a few brief moments we share that love as we pass the bread from one to another. But the challenge of communion is to make the moment of sharing a habit for a lifetime. After sharing the bread we don't want to retreat to what we have been, we want the bread to really be the bread of new creation, new people for a new world of hope and peace.

Jesus said, "*I am the bread of life*". We may have a thousand reasons for retreating from this wonderful gift - all the unwritten rules that we live by - but God has a wonderful, powerful way, of showing a new way of living as we break the bread of new creation. Take the bread, share the bread, become the bread of new creation.