

April 26, 2020: The Third Sunday in Easter

Scripture Reading: Luke 24:13-35 (from *The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson)

13-16 That same day two of them were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was.

17-18 He asked, "What's this you're discussing so intently as you walk along?"

They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend. Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said, "Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn't heard what's happened during the last few days?"

19-24 He said, "What has happened?"

They said, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word, blessed by both God and all the people. Then our high priests and leaders betrayed him, got him sentenced to death, and crucified him. And we had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about to deliver Israel. And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn't find his body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn't see Jesus."

25-27 Then he said to them, "So thick-headed! So slow-hearted! Why can't you simply believe all that the prophets said? Don't you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?" Then he started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to him.

28-31 They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on but they pressed him: "Stay and have supper with us. It's nearly evening; the day is done." So 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.

32 Back and forth they talked. "Didn't we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?"

A Ghost Doesn't Have Muscle and Bone

33-34 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—Simon saw him!"

35 Then the two went over everything that happened on the road and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.

The Message: Encountering New Possibilities

Week 6 of this new way of being – and we wonder how long this alternative reality will last. Some things haven't changed though. This is the third week of Easter and today's Gospel reading is one of my favorite for this season, but I believe it is also beloved for many people. Hence the beautiful stained glass window in our sanctuary. We hear the story of Cleopas and a companion leaving Jerusalem and headed to Emmaus – 7 miles away. The conversation as they walk along tells of their sadness and disappointment at what has recently transpired – their hopes dashed.

I was thinking about their hopes – that Jesus was the one who would lead them to a new future and I couldn't help but think about the hopes that have resided in this congregation. A hope that there would be a revival of energy with new members - and youth who would come from Camp Friendship; perhaps a new pastor who would bring energy and vitality and a new vision. And somehow the building's issues would be resolved so that hard decisions could be averted. Hopes and dreams that in some way this church could regain the vitality it had known in years past.

Some of those hopes sound as challenging as the ones Cleopas and his companion were expressing – that Jesus, who had been for them a prophet and inspirational leader – the one they hoped would redeem Israel – but had been handed over to be crucified. What a tumultuous Passover it had been. Three days had passed since Jesus' death and they had been hearing rumors – probably just idle tales – but – where had Jesus' body been taken?

As they journey along they are joined by a stranger – Jesus, but unrecognized – and he asks about what is concerning them so much. When they tell him he chides them, and then he fills in the history of God's working with people beginning with Moses. How many times has God reached out to humanity to draw them closer and how many times have people decided to go their own way? So God's great effort to reach us is through the Messiah and his suffering is a necessary part of this plan so that we might see him fully as God's son.

As I read this part of the story I am reminded how important it is for us to know the richness of the story of our faith. How has God journeyed with us and sought to partner with us over time?

Evening is near and Cleopas and companion are near home and the stranger prepares to go on, but since the hour is late Cleopas invites the stranger to join them at table. It is there, in the breaking of bread, that they recognize who it is who has accompanied them. Powerful Eucharist imagery! How many times do we not see – miss what is right before us? But it is also a reminder to us about the importance of hospitality. Had Cleopas and friend not extended the invitation they might never have known who their travel companion had been.

Jesus disappears but Cleopas and companion realize the rumors they had heard had merit – so late as it must have been, they head back to Jerusalem. We're not told any details of what happens next, but what we do know is that many came to believe because of them sharing this Good News.

A hymn I've grown fond of says "Sing of one who walks beside us, and this day is living still, one who now is closer to us than the thoughts our hearts distill." It's a hymn that reminds us Jesus is still with us, offering comfort for the violence that has been, but also hope for what can

be. Because of the hope born that day, the story did not end – and we are the ones called to carry it today.

Holy and gracious God, you who journey with us always, we turn to you in this strange time needing you – needing your assurances – and your presence with us. We are living in a strange world where much seems as it should be – new life emerging from winter's sleep – greenness and spring flowers bursting forth. Yet there is an invisible threat around us – a real virus - causing many to fear while others suffer and die. Help us, holy one, to remember the guidance you have given – to love one another as you have loved us – to keep each other safe.

Joys and Concerns:

We lift prayers of thanksgiving for all who are working so hard to provide healthcare, and needed provisions, and careful information we all need to make good decisions. Our prayers are also for families who are feeling the strain economically as well as on relationships. May we learn new patience with one another and ways to reach out to those in need to share our resources. We extend our prayers for all those in need of healing – for Jenn and all those who care for her, for Barbara, for Sara and all those who are recovering from heart and other health challenges. Special prayers for all our loved ones in assisted living – Geri, Yarka, Sid - for the loneliness that may come from being cut off from family and friends. Prayers for continued healing for David, health and hope for the Navaho Nation and for our church.

Loving God, our prayers extend to your world and for all around the globe who are struggling with the effects of this pandemic – both health and economic challenges. May we look to wise leaders for the way forward even as we trust in you for guidance.