

Luke 24: 13-35 Our Emmaus Moment

Driving up from Albuquerque yesterday, I could see for the first time this season that the cottonwood trees along the river and Highway 4 were definitely turning green. And when I arrived at church, I was delighted to see from the kitchen window the apricot tree, the younger live one, in full bloom. It's great to look out the window and see something white that's not snow! I missed the village Earth Day celebration yesterday but heard it was wonderful. The nature all around us is showing the signs of new life, and the air is warm and sweet. At church we sing the joyful hymn Christ Is Alive!

But the truth is, for many among us, life may not be all that bright and sweet just now; some of us may be feeling the disconnect between what we feel we should be feeling, joyful and cheerly, and how we actually feel when we wake up in the morning to face another day, anxious, overwhelmed, stressed. And there is no Blue Easter service like there is Blue Christmas to help us cope with this disconnect some of us may be feeling inside in this season of joy. I wish the world's problems and hardships in our lives would just melt away like snow when the spring comes. If they do, it would only turn into another problem, like flooding.

Even if things are fine in our own lives, we don't remain unaffected by the suffering of others, our loved ones and strangers alike. In so many ways, we witness the struggles of others, whether it is personal illness or our collective illness as a society. Our lives refuse to go with the flow of the nature or the church's liturgical season.

The story from Luke's Gospel this morning asks us not to move on from Easter so fast. On this Third Sunday of Easter, it brings us back to the first day of the week after Jesus' death and burial, and reminds us how the overwhelming sense of disappointment, sadness, and hopelessness is all part of the good news of Easter.

We don't know who the two traveling on the road to Emmaus are, other than the name of one of them, Cleopas. They were apparently in a larger circle of Jesus's followers, for they had heard about all that had happened concerning Jesus in Jerusalem, whom they regarded as a great prophet; they knew how the events of these days had unfolded, how their leaders had handed him over to the Roman authority to be crucified and now he was dead. They say they had hoped that Jesus was the one to save Israel. Perhaps they were among those who welcomed Jesus when he entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey, waving palms and shouting "Blessed be the King comes in the name of the Lord," only a week earlier.

They had even heard the report of the women who had gone to the empty tomb and saw the angels who told them Jesus was alive. But to them, their witness only offered a false hope, because when others went to the tomb, Jesus was nowhere to be found.

So, they were leaving Jerusalem behind, and with it their dashed hope for their savior. They were going home, to their old way of life, the life before they dared to hope and trust in this prophet Jesus, who was now dead. With him, their hope had died. Yet they couldn't help but rehash all that had happened, walking away from the place where they had thought God's promise of a savior would be fulfilled. They can't believe this happened.

I wondered if they were also feeling angry that God did not keep the promise for them as was passed down to them in the Scripture, God did not save them as in the past. I wondered if they felt Jesus had let them down, as we might feel when we cannot feel God's presence and God's touch when we so desperately needed them. And, like them, we walk away from the source of our hope, thinking perhaps we had misplaced our hope?

Right then, Jesus joins them, just as they are walking further and further away from the holy city, the house of God, further and further away from their once cherished hope for their savior. Jesus literally steps into their discussion with a question, "what are you guys talking about, as you are walking along?" and this makes them stop; they stand still, looking dejected, dispirited.

And Cleopas asks Jesus, if he's the only visitor to the Jerusalem who doesn't know the horrible things that have taken place there. And this is really ironic, because Jesus is actually the only one who knows the full meaning of what has taken place there. Cleopas could tell only part that he knew concerning Jesus and it ended a tragedy, not good news.

And so, Jesus tells them the whole story, beginning with the Moses and all the prophets, interpreting the Scriptures so as to put what they knew in the context of the larger story of God's salvation. They had hoped Jesus was the one to save Israel, but God's plan is even greater; God intends to save all of God's children.

Like them, when we are faced with a situation that makes us lose all hope, we don't, we can't see how God might possibly turn this hopeless situation for our salvation that makes us whole, not broken or lacking, but whole. That's what the word salvation in the Bible essentially means. We cannot see it, because we see only part, and the part we see feels hopeless, like an abyss we cannot get out of. When we are in that place in our lives, we don't care if the beautiful

spring is coming, because our hearts are frozen shut and our minds become numb, as if they were lifeless. And that's still part of our Easter story.

Because that's when the risen Christ comes to us, on the road when we are walking away from the heart of God. The risen Jesus meets us on *our* road to *our* Emmaus, stops us, and engages us.

Cleopas and his traveling buddy still didn't see that it was Jesus himself speaking to them. Our eyes are kept from recognizing the risen Christ. But something told them to ask Jesus to stay with them. The Greek word they use when asking Jesus to "stay with" them, is the word we read elsewhere in the Scripture as "abide" or "dwell" or "remain with." It speaks of God's presence with us and in us. So, they asked Jesus, "remain with us." And Jesus did.

While Jesus was staying with them, at the table, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them, and then the two's eyes were opened, and they recognized it was Jesus. But then, Jesus was gone. The risen Jesus is elusive and not recognizable by sight. But the presence of Jesus is made known to us by the action of breaking the bread and offering it. And we know what that action is about. At the last supper before he was handed over to the authority, Jesus broke the bread and offered it to the disciples, saying "this is my body broken for you, do this and remember me." We, the post-Resurrection people, like Cleopas and his traveling buddy, can recognize the Christ's real presence in the breaking of the bread.

This Emmaus moment of encounter with the risen Christ, in the breaking of bread, was the moment something shifted in them, the moment of transition from disbelief and amazement that the tomb was empty, to the belief that he was alive. Jesus's sacrificial offering of himself as the bread of life, empowered them to remember what they had felt in their body, how their hearts burned and felt very much alive, when Jesus was unpacking the Scripture for them to hear God's promise being fulfilled in Jesus. Having realized they had seen the risen Lord, they turn around and go back to Jerusalem, to the city of God, to join others at the heart of God. There, the community remain together.

What do our Emmaus moments look like, I wonder. If the post-resurrection, post-Easter Jesus is no longer recognizable by sight but by the sacrificial offering of oneself for the sake of the other, where have we met the risen Christ? In what disguise did he come? Where do we experience, outside the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, this sacrificial offering of oneself for the sake of the other? Surely, Christ is present in our lives beyond the Communion Sunday.

I invite you to search for your Emmaus Moment in your memory. Do you recall when you felt someone's presence in your life, at a particular moment, was "God-sent"? When you felt like you were walking away from the heart of God, or when God walking away from you from our vantage point, when your most precious hope had been dashed, and someone or something somehow stopped you from going further down the road of hopelessness. What was the "bread" they broke for you? Literally a meal when you could not cook. Or a gracious offer of money you desperately needed, or a prayer, or simply a quiet companionship.

And I also invite you to remember the moments in your life when you were there for someone who was in a hopeless state; where you felt as if you were sent for that person, and you broke off and offered a piece of yourself.

In the book titled "Let Your Life Speak," the author Parker Palmer recounts how, during the worst days of his depression, a friend came to him. He writes: "There was this one friend who came to me, after asking permission to do so, every afternoon about 4 o'clock, sat me down in a chair in the living room, took off my shoes and socks, and massaged my feet. He hardly ever said anything... He would give no advice. He would simply report, from time to time, what he was intuiting about my condition. Somehow he found the one place in my body, namely the soles of my feet, where I could experience some sort of connection to another human being. And the act of massaging just—in a way that I really don't have words for—kept me connected with the human race."

Palmer is not saying that the friend saved him from depression, but he stayed with him, rubbing his feet day after day; he remained with him, his presence felt through the healing touch.

Luke casts the journey of Jesus and of the church itself as the unfolding history of salvation that beginning with Israel and through the Spirit extends salvation to the ends of the earth. We say we are Easter people, we experience the risen Christ through our mutual offering of ourselves, as we remember Jesus, our living bread.

May our eyes be opened to recognize our risen Lord, when our Emmaus moment comes. May the risen Christ be made known to all whom you encounter on their road to Emmaus.

Amen