

“The Way of Faithfulness”

Luke 24:13-35

The 2nd Sunday of Easter

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Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, ‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’ He asked them, ‘What things?’ They replied, ‘The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.’ Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the

Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Last Sunday, of course was Easter. The pews were packed, chattering children adding their joyful noise to the sounds of the organ, brass and choir –

it was *splendid*. But – as always after Easter – life goes on. And for many of us, Easter quickly fades in the rearview mirror, and we get on with our lives.

What difference *does* Easter make? We wouldn't be the first to ask. Even that first Easter, 2,000 years ago, there were those who wondered – among them, Cleopas and an unnamed disciple, followers of Jesus who were trying to breach the cognitive dissonance of what they witnessed for themselves, and what they were told by others. They no doubt had witnessed Jesus' crucifixion. They'd been in Jerusalem for Passover, and it would have been impossible to miss that sordid spectacle. The religious and political leaders had gone out of their way to make their point – publicly humiliating the erstwhile “King of the Jews” and smashing any hopes of their followers. But since then ... since then, the strangest rumors had started to circulate. Some women who'd gone to Jesus' tomb to anoint his body – these women came back with the wildest tale, that his body wasn't in the grave, that he'd been raised from the dead.

So now, Cleopas and his friend are heading out to Emmaus, and as they walk, they're trying to put the pieces together. Nothing makes any sense. Jesus had taught his followers how to walk in faith ... had led them on roads of compassion and generosity, had guided them to resilience and wisdom ... and they were sure he was the Messiah, to save the nation. And then ... then he was tortured and crucified. That was enough to make their heads reel. And

now ... now some are saying he's raised from the dead? None of it adds up. None of it makes any sense.

And I wonder ... I wonder if you've ever felt that way too. You thought your life was going one direction, but then, something goes terribly wrong. You thought you were doing a great job – and suddenly, you get called into the boss's office, and you're done, told to pack up your desk that very day. You thought your child was growing up magnificently – and suddenly, the doctor's visit takes a strange twist, and a diagnosis emerges that takes the wind out of your sails. You thought your marriage was solid – there was no reason to think otherwise – and one day, your beloved sets divorce papers in front of you. You thought you were a true-blue American, and then this election cycle comes along, and you wonder if you belong in the U.S. anymore, because it's just gotten way too liberal and politically correct, or way too conservative and exclusive, or simply way too coarse and jaded, and you want to run away to Canada ... or back to 1980. Or maybe it's none of those things – maybe it has nothing to do with your relationships at all, but something deep inside yourself. You're restless. Or you're angry all the time. Or you find yourself drinking more than you'd like. Or you don't know if you belong in church, because you're not sure whether you still believe in God at all, quite honestly. And nothing makes sense. The world you thought you inhabited is changed before your eyes. How absurd – even cruel – would it be

to hear rumors of wonder, rumors of hope, rumors of new life – while you're still reeling from the shock of a lifetime?

But here's the thing: just like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, it is likely that this is *exactly* when Jesus comes alongside us, to walk along the road with us. Exactly when our world is turned upside down. Exactly when things don't add up. Exactly when things don't make any sense. Exactly when there is no reason to hope.

Yet – this is crucial - just like the first disciples, even though Jesus is with us *doesn't mean we recognize him*. Let me say it again. Even when Jesus is with us doesn't mean we recognize he's here. He still shows up for us, in a thousand ways, even when we do not know it.

- I think of my sister last year, or Laura Sibley or the Cassin family right now, struggling with grave illness, who find enormous comfort in the prayers and practical help from their family of faith. When our hearts are terrified, and life is terribly uncertain, and a friend comes alongside us with a word of encouragement, a gesture of compassion: is that not Christ who walks the road with us?
- I think of members of our church whose finances have been dashed, or whose marriage or job fell apart because of moral failure, who have discovered that their friends in Christ have not abandoned them, but urge

them to be here more often. When our pockets are empty or temptation has undone us, and shame threatens to engulf us, and strangers invite us to the table of grace: is that not Christ who walks the road with us?

- I think of my own life and the incredible counselor who guided me through my darkest grief, till I saw light again, a joy I never thought I'd feel again. When our minds are confused and our hearts are broken and the world we thought we understood is turned upside down, and someone takes our hand and guides us through the darkness: is that not Christ who walks the road with us?
- I think of so many here who have wondered whether any of this talk of faith is true, why we should bother with this old-fashioned, imperfect church anymore, how it makes any difference whether we believe in God, and then ... and then a snowstorm in April fills us with wonder, or a familiar song prompts a memory of who we once were, or a child makes us laugh as if we ourselves were children once again: is it not Christ who enters our heart at that moment? Is it not Christ who walks this road of life with us?

If we think Easter happened once and for all, 2,000 years ago, and now it's behind us – well, we've missed the point. Easter is still happening, right here, right now, today, as Christ comes near us, whether or not we recognize him in those who walk this road with us.

But today at this table, as we break bread together once more in his name, I invite you to open your hearts and know that he is here. Taste and see how he is near, in the breaking of the bread. Taste and see how he still lingers with us, in the tasting of the cup. Let your hearts be warmed within you to feel his living presence even now. Let your eyes be open to this family he has gathered, who surround us as his love embodied here. As it happened for the first disciples long ago, let us meet our risen Lord this very day, as he invites us to sit and rest, to be refreshed. For every time we eat this bread and drink this cup, we taste and see how gracious the Lord really is.