



Sermon for Third Sunday of Easter, April 2023

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

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Acts 2:14a,36-41

1 Peter 1:17-23

Luke 24:13-35

Take a journey with me. It was the third day after Jesus was killed. The disciples were all gathered in what was probably a locked room. It was the day after the sabbath, so a few of the women went to the tomb taking spices they had prepared. What they found was the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Then two men appeared – angels – asking the women, “Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” Don’t you remember how Jesus told you he had to be handed over to sinners and be crucified and on the third day rise again? The women remembered and I imagine they ran back to tell the eleven and the others gathered what they had seen and heard.

The disciples didn’t believe them, calling it an idle tale. But Peter, and perhaps a few more, ran to the tomb to check for themselves. We are told that Peter went home after visiting the tomb, amazed at what he had seen.

We get to today’s scripture, where two of the disciples who were in the room where all of this had taken place, also decided to return to what was probably home for them, walking to the village of Emmaus, about seven miles away. I’m sure they were sad, perplexed, and maybe even wondering if what the women had said could be possible.

This trek these disciples embarked upon was not small. Having just been to the Holy Lands this past March, I can tell you the countryside is extremely hilly with steep, steep ups- and-downs. Steep, like Nob Hill in San Francisco, or if you are a local hiker, like the switchbacks at Mineral Ridge on Lake Coeur d’Alene, or Scotchman Peak in the Cabinet Mountains up near Lake Pend Oreille.

As they walked, they talked about everything that had happened, I imagine trying to make sense of it all. Jesus joins them, but they don’t recognize him. He is the same person – this Jesus -- yet he is not. He is now the Risen Christ transformed – he is entering into his glory. These disciples are so mired in their grief and wondering they don’t yet see this transformation. In fact, in the Mark version of this story, it says he appeared to the two walking in the country in another form.

Seeing and recognizing are not the same thing. It happened numerous times as Jesus appeared to different disciples at different times – Mary thought he was the gardener and these two thought he was a stranger who joined them in their walk. Isn’t this the case in our lives even now, when we see things, and only later do we recognize them as something else? A sunset is often viewed the same every day, and then one day we stop in awe and wonder, recognizing it for what it is, God’s great handiwork...Something about this particular sunset deeply touches us. Or we pass a homeless person without real recognition, and then another time, we stop to offer food or a small amount of money – we see this homeless face as a person, just as we are, we recognize their humanity, or perhaps it’s the Christ in them.

As they were walking, Jesus calls the disciples out for their perplexity – 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?

I had to check on the word choice – foolish – it's not the first time that Jesus has called out his disciples as being slow to catch onto something. Being told you are foolish feels so condescending, and I don't think that's what Jesus was hoping to convey. I like the words the Message translation uses – thick-headed -- or perhaps, unwise or lacking good sense, which is how foolish is defined in several dictionaries I checked.

But it's the next sentence that always gets me – Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. Just like Mary sitting at Jesus' feet listening to his teaching, the thought of hearing Jesus interpret the scriptures makes my heart burn with longing for a deeper understanding of all he taught. Wouldn't this be so incredible?

After they arrive at their destination, they come to table. It is in the blessing, the breaking, and the giving of the bread that the disciples' eyes are opened. As they recognize that this person they spoke with all day while traveling was indeed the risen Christ, he vanishes.

True recognition takes place – were our hearts not burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us? They got up and made the seven-mile trek back to Jerusalem to find the other disciples to tell them what had happened. The experience was so powerful, they made the long trip back to Jerusalem, probably not arriving until well after sunset, just to share what had happened. And while they were sharing – that very same evening – Jesus appears to this group saying, “Peace be with you.”

On the last full day of our pilgrimage to the Holy Lands, we went to the hilltop that is believed to be where the village of Emmaus was – it's not a town in the area anymore – and the place where the disciples and Jesus stopped for the night. Of course, there is now a church on the spot, as is the case with most of the holy sites throughout the land. This church was closed for repairs, so we instead sat out in a garden overlooking the valleys and hills around us looking toward Jerusalem, about seven miles away. Even though it was during Lent, we celebrated Easter on this holy hill, acclaiming our Risen Lord, experiencing the wonder of the Risen Christ in the place these disciples also experienced the same. It indeed was an awe-inspiring celebration that I will always hold dear to my heart.

This resurrection – it can be immediate as what seems to be the case with Jesus, but it can also be an awakening happening over time. Think about it, resurrection happens all the time – we are amid one of the most obvious occurrences right now as our plants are starting to awaken and grow, coming out of dormancy and the sleeping of winter. We see it in the regeneration of broken bones or a small cut; in forgiveness and reconciliation, especially when relationships are repaired; and even daily in the transition from darkness to light as the sun rises. We can trust Jesus' resurrection because we see it happening everywhere else. It is an archetypal model for the entire pattern of creation.

It seems that modern science is finally catching up to what the divine has been telling us all along. Nothing stays the same forever, and these jaw-dropping, extraordinary experiences that induce wonder help us live longer and happier lives. Researchers at UC Berkely's Greater Good Science Center say these awe-inspiring experiences help us to contemplate things beyond our own existence, humbling us. In this state of "small self," we lose our ego and focus instead upon that which is around us.

"Resurrection" is another word for change, but particularly positive change. Resurrection can be an unfolding for us too as our faith continues to awaken. These little resurrections that happen for us in our daily lives enable us to live more fully into the light of Christ and in turn to become Christ's light for others.

We are never the same once we encounter the risen Christ. As the disciples traveled with Jesus to Emmaus, resurrection was unfolding for them. As Jesus broke bread and gave it, they recognized the risen Christ, and they were not the same. We too can meet the risen Christ each week as we celebrate the Eucharist, through the breaking of the bread. As we live into resurrection life, we become more empowered to do the work God asks us to do.

I invite you to put yourself in this scene and imagine walking with Jesus. When have you experienced a burning, a yearning for God? Where does Jesus meet us in our wandering? How else do we see Jesus now? How do we help each other see Jesus now? Perhaps we can do as Peter exhorts, "love one another deeply from the heart."

When we put ourselves into these stories, such as the walk to Emmaus, roasting fish on the beach, or giving Jesus something to eat, the experience can have a real and tangible impact in our relationship with the risen Christ.

We can rest assured that Jesus is always walking with us. We only need to open ourselves to this reality and let it be our guide. I ask Jesus to remove the scales from my eyes so that I can see more clearly. I pray that the light of the risen Christ illuminates my heart so that I can see things in their fullness, that my heart might burn with desire to be the hands and feet of Christ here and now, that I can see Christ in all that is around me. Amen.