



Sermon for the Third Sunday of Easter, April 2020

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

The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Acts 2:14a,36-41](#) [Psalm 116:1-3,10-17](#) [1 Peter 1:17-23](#) [Luke 24:13-35](#)

Oh Risen Jesus, be near to us in this time, help us open ourselves to you who meets us on our journeys, and help us to see with new eyes the beauty of your resurrection and the hope and promise of new and everlasting life in you. Amen.

Christ is risen.

Christ is risen!

Remember, friends, to say "Alleluia" – each day through this season of Easter.

This account of Jesus with two companions on the road to Emmaus is one of the treasures of the Gospels. We only find it in Luke. Two companions on the road, trying to make sense of what has happened and what is happening. One is unnamed – and we each can see ourselves in this unnamed disciple, on a journey, talking with another, trying to understand.

Such is the time we live in, right now. Trying to understand. We have so many conflicting voices, fighting for the right to interpret how serious or spurious is the threat of the COVID-19 coronavirus, trying to weigh the costs and benefits of a society and world, and its economic engines, slowing down for the sake of reducing threats to health. People in households and out on the roads and in grocery stores and hospitals discussing with one another the situation we find ourselves in, trying to create a narrative.

Many of us may not be travelers right now, during this time of staying at home. We may feel more like what the author of 1 Peter names as a reality for some early Christians in ancient Rome – the author says "If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile." We may be experiencing just a taste of what it is like to live in a kind of exile, or as a refugee – limited in our movement, carefully measuring out our use of resources, limited in our engagement with others. The disciple John was an exile who lived the remainder of his days on an island, and there he had the visions that became the book of Revelation. But really, it is not the same challenges or suffering as true exiles or refugees – at most, we are experiencing something that gives us a taste.

But there are travelers, and exiles and refugees, and homeless poor, walking through these challenging times. I just assisted a young homeless man in returning to Texas after spending part of the year here. Helping him find some shelter and food along the long and interrupted bus journey demanded some creativity during this time. There are still travelers on the road – there are those

seeking food during this pandemic when unemployment has increased dramatically, there are those supplying food and medical resources and other essential materials, there are those who are making their ways back home after not being able to travel, there are those checking in on friends and neighbors, there are those being more frivolous.

Whether we are traveling or isolating, on the road or in our homes, we are not alone. Though the world has quieted, we are not alone. In today's Gospel reading about the risen Jesus, there is a lot to gain from seeing how Jesus comes near, accompanies, and interacts with these two travelers. As the two travelers talk with each other,

Jesus comes near.

Jesus listens.

Jesus asks questions.

Jesus walks with them and talks with them.

Jesus listens to what they are talking about. And, surely, Jesus knows what they are talking about and recognizes what they are discussing – and no one knew more about what they were discussing than Jesus himself. But Jesus does not begin by barging into their conversation with all he might have to say. He listens, and he asks, "What are you discussing?"

Jesus' question brings them to a stop, and opens a doorway – a doorway for the travelers to show their sorrow and grief, and to feel it in a fresh way with someone they do not think they know. And, the travelers are honest. They show their sadness. And they show their surprise that this stranger does not seem to know the events that they are discussing. Jesus accepts their surprise, and asks a second question, "What things? What things do you mean?" Jesus opens the doorway again and asks to be invited in – "Tell me, let me know." The travelers tell the story – they talk of their beloved friend and teacher who was killed cruelly, they talk about their hopes that were lost, and they talk about the strange new sightings of their friend and teacher by other companions.

This story from Luke is often used to emphasize the importance and power of meeting Jesus in the Eucharist – in the breaking and sharing of the bread. And, yes, that is an important piece of this story. But it is not just in the breaking of the bread that they recognize Jesus. Their hearts began to open as soon as Jesus appeared with them and entered into their journey and their conversation.

Jesus meets us, wherever we are in our travels or our staying in place – on the road or huddled in rooms, in the open or withdrawn to ourselves.

The travelers open themselves to the stranger who has met them, come alongside them, listened, and asked questions.

It strikes me that THIS is the beginning of recognizing Jesus – when we open ourselves, honestly and completely, not just in our heady thoughts but in the heart and gut of what we have experienced. The travelers are open with Jesus. They do not hide. They invite Jesus to know their sorrow, their pain,

their confusion, their excitement – and their deep love for the one they followed. They spoke of all of this from their love.

It is then as Jesus listens to them, invites their story, and welcomes their hearts as they speak, that another door opens. They have been heard. Now they are ready to hear Jesus open new ways of seeing and understanding all that has happened.

When have you had conversation with someone that has lifted you, held your attention completely, and kept you lingering for more?

The travelers' hearts were warmed powerfully as they walked and talked with this One who was there to listen, to accompany, and to invite them to see in new ways.

The bread we break and share every day is God's blessing and is a sign for us of God's sustaining presence.

The water we wash in every day is the same as the water of our baptism, and is a sign each day of God's cleansing and healing and refreshing presence.

But we risk missing these signs all around us – those moments that really, really wake us up even in the ordinary things of life – if we have not opened ourselves, mind, heart, and gut, to ourselves and to God, and to others around us including the many others we meet along the way on our journey.

The doorway to knowing and being with Jesus begins with opening ourselves when Jesus approaches – the One whom we seek and serve in all persons, as we say we will do in our promises of baptism. Who knows what Christ will offer us through each person we encounter, if we can but open ourselves to share and exchange?

Christ is risen. You will meet Christ. Even in this time.

So, as we hope and seek, let us also open ourselves to others as they invite us. And, as followers of Jesus, let us take the time that Jesus took to listen, accompany, and ask questions that invite others to open their own hearts. This is the ground in which the Holy Spirit stirs, where hearts are warmed, where eyes are prepared to see and minds are prepared to recognize.

This is art of how we love deeply from the heart, as I Peter invites us. By opening space, opening hearts, and taking time. So, Linger. Let yourself be open to seeing in new ways. Then, when we break bread, wherever we are, we will know Christ is with us.