

Year A, 3rd Sunday in Easter
Acts 2:14a,36-41
Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17
1 Peter 1:17-23
Luke 24:13-35

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

So—In today’s Gospel, Luke is telling an amazing story. He tells it in his typically concise way, and as he so often does, in the context of a journey. Because of Luke’s style, it’s not especially easy to see the emotion, or the remarkable nature of it, unless you sit with it for a while, and make it your own. It might help if we put ourselves into the story, for instance. Cleopas and his fellow disciple are leaving Jerusalem, and heading toward the village of Emmaus. In a way, it’s nice that we don’t know the name of the second disciple. It enables us to put ourselves into the story—can you put yourself in the place of Cleopas’s companion?

Let’s set the scene: it’s the Sunday of Jesus’s Resurrection, and according to Luke’s version, earlier this morning, Mary Magdalen, and the other women had come to Jesus’ tomb but found it empty. Then “two men in dazzling clothes,” told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. The women then told this to the apostles, none of whom believed them, except, possibly, for Peter, who ran to the tomb. When he saw that nothing was there except Jesus’ shroud, Luke says he “was amazed at what had happened.” But no one seems to understand the *importance* of what’s happened. Now, if you’ll step into the story, you’ll realize that, you and the other disciples are devastated at the failure of what you thought Jesus’ plan was. Jesus, your leader, who was supposed to be the Messiah, was executed by the very Roman government that he was supposed to overthrow. You thought that Jesus was supposed to make everything better, and to usher in a new age of universal peace. Now he is degraded, and dead. Not only dead, but his body has disappeared under very suspicious circumstances. You as one of his disciples, might have given up everything to follow him. Now your whole world has crumbled. As far as you know, the Messiah is dead, God’s plan is destroyed, and your whole life is a wreck.

And so you might as well go with Cleopas to Emmaus, which is about a 7-mile walk, but since you’re used to walking everywhere, it will only take about two hours, maybe a little more, if the road is bad. And it will be good to commiserate with Cleopas about what a mess everything is in. And so you’re talking, discussing everything that’s happened, trying to make sense of it all, and this man comes alongside you, and asks you what you’re talking about. His question is so incredible that you and Cleopas stop in your tracks—I mean, who hasn’t heard what happened to Jesus? But for you, this is personal. The two of you are so miserable, you can hardly tell this man—a stranger—what you were talking about. Then Cleopas finally manages to say, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who doesn’t know the things that have taken place in these days?” Amazingly, the stranger says, “what things?”

Then the story tumbles out of the two of you all at once, the arrest, the crucifixion, the burial, the empty tomb—and this nonsense about angels. We're so upset, and we don't know what to do.

Then, this stranger looks at you, almost affectionately (and I'm going to use something that's a bit closer to the Greek here) and he says, "how can you two be so dense that you don't understand what the prophets have revealed about Jesus? Wasn't it necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and *then* enter into his glory?" You and Cleopas are a bit amazed, but you listen as this stranger explains to you all about how scripture has foretold Jesus' coming, since the time of Moses.

Eventually, you reach Emmaus, and the stranger acts like he's going to leave you—but it's almost dark, and the laws of hospitality to strangers really require you to invite him for dinner. So he stays, and you all wash up, and sit down at the table together. The stranger takes bread, and blesses it, and breaks it, and gives it to you. And suddenly you realize that it's been Jesus the whole time!!! AND THEN HE VANISHES.

Whoa! It was Jesus the whole time! And weren't our hearts burning within us the whole time he was opening the scriptures to us? Suddenly, life doesn't seem like a total wreck anymore. No! You have to go back to Jerusalem and tell the apostles what's happened—they need to know that you've seen Jesus. It's just like the women said—he HAS risen from the dead. So, even though it's dark now, you walk the 7 miles back. You find the 11 apostles, and the other disciples gathered together, talking excitedly. "The Lord is risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" they say. "Wonderful," you say, "and he appeared to us on the road to Emmaus, but we didn't even recognize him until he made himself known in the breaking of the bread."

In this story they go from depression and despair to excitement and hope, in the course of a few hours. They realize that all is not lost—no, things are just different than they expected them to be. They have to learn a *different* plan. Not that Jesus didn't try to teach them the real plan when he was alive. The disciples ARE the original remedial learners. But they're getting it now. And because of that, *now we can get it*, too.

Notice that, in this story Jesus reveals the true meaning of his life, death and resurrection to the disciples in explanation of scripture. There's no mention of parables, or confusing stories. He's making God's plan clear to them. But, just like in all of the other stories about his post-resurrection appearances, Jesus' resurrection body is somehow different from his human body, so no one recognizes him at first. It takes a familiar action, like the blessing and breaking of bread, for them to see, AHA it's Jesus! Here we see that Jesus is present to us, like it says in the liturgy, in word and sacrament: he is present explaining *scripture*, and his place in the story of God's people, and he is present in the *breaking of the bread*, just as he did at the last supper.

And notice, too, that Jesus was going to go on, and leave them after he had explained everything to them. Even though these men are his disciples, he doesn't ask them to feed him, or

put him up for the night. He waits to be **invited**. *Even now, when he is ever-present, Jesus waits for us to invite him to stay. Into our hearts, and into our lives.*

Because Jesus is present in our lives, even when we don't see him. We've talked before about how God is that in which we live and move and have our being. We are always in God's presence. And then there are the times when we DO see Jesus—when he steps into our lives, and walks a part of our path with us, sits with us, blesses us, and leads us. When we realize that he's here. What do we do with that? Cleopas and his friend acted immediately. What do we do? How do we recognize the in-breaking of Jesus' presence with us today? And how do we respond?

I see Jesus in the compassionate care that so many of the nurses gave in the hospital where I worked—patiently, meticulously, cheerfully tending to the needs of very sick people. I see the Spirit moving in the volunteer who helped one of our food pantry clients to load her groceries into her car. Not all of God's work in our lives is dramatic. Sometimes it's very mundane, but if we watch for it we can see when Jesus walks alongside us, and even be guided by him, if we're paying attention.

A couple of years ago I was in a family meeting with a patient's children, the patient's nurse, and the intensive care doctor. Being at these meetings was a fairly common part of my job, especially when the patient's prognosis was poor. On this day, the doctor had very bad news for the family, but she didn't just blurt it out. She had never met these people before, and had only had the patient in her care for a few hours, since she'd been sent up from the emergency room. The doctor wanted to know who this person really was that she was taking care of, and what was important to her, and what brought her joy. So the children talked about their mother, about her values, her faith, and her strength of character. Together they worked with the doctor, and with me, to plan their mother's care so that they could honor her end-of-life wishes. It was a time full of emotion, and difficult decision-making—and during that meeting, I felt Jesus to be profoundly present.

Just like on the road to Emmaus, Jesus is present with us, whether we realize it or not. The key is to be on the watch for him. Watch for acts of compassion, for respect, for love, for kindness. And then be guided by him to do these things ourselves. Amen.

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