

Gospel

Luke 24:13-35

That very day, the first day of the week, two of the disciples 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.

Be known to us Lord Jesus, in the breaking of the bread

Today's gospel reading is a flashback to Easter Day. Now that the Sabbath is over, two disciples have decided to leave Jerusalem and travel to Emmaus. We don't know if Emmaus was their hometown or perhaps they have some job opportunity there. We do know that they left the other disciples in Jerusalem that morning, right after the women discovered that the tomb was empty and delivered the astounding news that Jesus is alive. These two men are walking along the road, talking about the horrific events of the past week and commiserating in their grief. They have heard about the resurrection from the women and from the other disciples who went to see the empty tomb, but they do not believe it. They are having a conversation that does not include any of the Good News. They are discussing the events of the last few days, but there is no hope on the horizon for them, no resurrection Gospel.

Suddenly, a man appears on the road with them. He walks along with them close enough to hear the content of their conversation. He asks them, "What are you two talking about?" The disciples stop walking and turn to face this man on the road. One of the disciples, Cleopas, asks him "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place

there in these days?" The disciples are not talking to a stranger, they are talking to Jesus. But they do not recognize him because they do not believe in the resurrection. They are mired in the events of betrayal, humiliation, despair, and death. Jesus, on the other hand, cannot understand what they are talking about because he is the resurrection. The events of the last week are not the end of the world, they are the beginning of a new creation, and Jesus is the firstborn of that new creation. So Jesus responds to Cleopas, "What things have taken place?"

Well, Cleopas and the other disciple pour out their hearts to this stranger on the road. They tell Jesus all about himself and their hopes that he might redeem Israel. They tell him how their hopes were nailed to the cross when he died and now they don't know what to believe. These disciples are just like us when we experience a traumatic loss in our lives. They need to tell the story to each other and to anyone who will listen so that they can share the heavy burden of sadness. They replay the events over and over again in their mind to help it all sink in so that they can understand their new reality, a world without Jesus. We share our tragic stories with friends and family and therapists and clergy and anyone who proves to be a good listener. We do this to sort out the events and our feelings before we can move on with our lives. The disciples were so sure that Jesus was the messiah, but since he suffered such humiliation and died on the cross they must have been wrong about him. Instead of Messiah, they call Jesus a prophet. They are trying to re-interpret their relationship with Jesus in order to make sense of his death.

But Jesus, the stranger on the road with them, won't let them rewrite the past and demote him from Messiah to mere messenger. Jesus stops 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 Jesus walks the disciples through the scriptures from Moses to all the prophets and he shows them how the suffering and death of Jesus was always part of the salvation story. Jesus helps them to live with their grief and recognize that Jesus was the messiah. And he explains all of this as they walk along the road towards Emmaus.

When they reach the village where they plan to spend the night, the stranger who has become a friend is invited to stay with them for supper and a comfortable rest. Jesus accepts their invitation and as they sit down to eat, Jesus takes the bread, blesses it and breaks it before them. The two disciples are transported back to the last supper as they recognize his familiar hands, his face, his voice in this first communion with the risen Lord. It is Jesus who has come to share a meal with them again. They recognize him in the breaking of the bread and suddenly, the world is not full of grief and despair and loss. The world is full of the Good News that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He is the Messiah! Jesus is the Christ, the one who has come to save the world. Their eyes are opened to the resurrection and the whole world changes for them.

The disciples are so energized by the resurrection that they leave their dinner table and run all the way back to Jerusalem that very night to share the Good News with the rest of the disciples. The journey that took them all day becomes an evening footrace with their desire to share the Gospel. You could draw a line from this story, handed down through the generations, all the way to our own altar table and the meal we share each Sunday we gather. 2000 years of disciples everywhere recognizing Jesus in the breaking of the bread. In fact, the road to Emmaus is really an outline of our own worship service. First we are on the road with Jesus, telling him about our lives, our hopes and our fears, and he responds to us by explaining the scriptures. This is the Liturgy of the Word and the Prayers of the People. When we arrive at our destination, we share the peace and invite Jesus to stay with us for dinner. And instead of remaining a guest at

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our dinner table, Jesus becomes our host. When we say the Eucharistic prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to come down on these gifts of bread and wine, Jesus is there and the risen Lord breaks the bread of communion so that we might be fed. As you come to the table this morning, know that Jesus is present among us. He is here to listen to our soaring hopes and our deepest sorrows. He is here to reveal God's plan for salvation through the scriptures. And he is here to feed us so that we might know him and believe in the resurrection. When our worship is over, may you be so energized by the power of the resurrection, that you run to friends, family, and strangers to share the Good News with them and invite them to the feast at the table of the risen Lord.

Amen.