

## “Straight From the Heart”

Luke 24: 13-35

"Now on that same day" ....this is how our Scripture starts, letting us know that we are still talking about Easter Sunday. The rest of the world has moved on but we as people of faith are still celebrating. We are now in the season of Easter and today we get an Easter story for the rest of us. By this I mean, the rest of us who were not there on that first Easter morning, the rest of us who have not physically touched the Risen Christ, You know the rest of us who are experiencing the story of the resurrection some two thousand years later.

As we may remember, on Easter morning the women went to the tomb, found it empty, and then returned to tell the disciples what they saw. Our text picks up the story from this point. As readers, we are told on that same day, two people are making their way to Emmaus. We are told they still can't believe what happened. They still can't believe the women's "idle tale".

Think about the significance of this for a moment. This moment at the Empty Tomb is a foundational piece of our faith as the people of God and yet.... the disciples at least at this point of the story are still thinking of the resurrection as an idle tale. Think about that for a moment and let it sink in. Is it any wonder why we get the same reaction some two thousand years later whenever we as disciples

of Christ talk about serving a Risen Savior? For many, it really is simply an idle tale. And let's be honest, for many of us connected with communities of faith, even for us, the very ones who have experienced the mystery and holiness of God in our own lives, even for us, too often we find ourselves wondering the same thing. Is it all just an idle tale?

I have to tell you that, oddly enough, I find it comforting to know that the authors of the Gospels included stories like this one for us post- first Easter people. To know that they purposely added stories like this one, to let us know that we are not alone in our doubt, to let us know that we are not alone in our uncertainty. It is comforting to realize that the Gospel writers are actually acknowledging our frustration. Because like them, we don't have all the answers to our questions of faith. Like them, we have a need to actually experience the Risen Christ. We have a need for the resurrection to be something tangible. Thankfully, the Gospel writers understood that we, as people who were not there at the Empty tomb on that first Easter morning, we, meaning the rest of us have a need for the resurrection to be something more than just an experience someone else had and later shared the story.

As a person of faith, living in a post-modern, post-Easter morning, and as much as we don't like to admit it, a post-church world, I find it oddly comforting to know that the Gospel writers added stories like this one to help us realize that

the resurrection is not an idle tale. It is not just something others experienced and we, the rest of us, are left wondering about its meaning for, meaning in our lives. It is oddly comforting to know that the Gospels writers included stories like this one to once again say to the world, to say to us, as ones who follow a Risen Savior, remember death and darkness will not be the last word.

Luke reiterates this point time and time again with this wonderfully rich theological story. He reminds us again and again that faith is a journey. It has its ups and downs yet it never allows darkness to have the final word.

That's why I want us to take a deeper look at this story because given everything that's going on currently in our world, we as people of faith are having our own Walk to Emmaus moment. Suddenly everything has changed. Church is no longer connected to buildings and programs. As the Body of Christ, we are being challenged to look beyond what is right in front of our faces and see, not with our eyes but see with eyes of faith, the Christ that is in our midst. We are being challenged to put aside everything we thought we knew about what it meant to be the Church and discern what it means to be the living, breathing, transforming heart of God here and now.

And it is hard. Like the disciples on the road that day, we are "too overwhelmed to think beyond our pain." It is frightening. Everything we thought to

be True has crumbled. Yet, it is also freeing in a way. This pandemic has stripped away the false narratives. Oddly enough, this pandemic is reminding us of the power of the resurrection once more. The darkness will not have the last word. Our current situation which is so similar to that moment on the Walk to Emmaus for the disciples is inviting us to see not with our eyes but to see with the eyes of faith, to know that in the end, love will remain.

As readers we are told of two people making a journey away from Jerusalem. We can assume that these two are disciples. We are told they are so disappointed, so disorientated, so frustrated that on the same day while the others were celebrating, they decided to leave town. Sure, they had heard the story from the women but to be honest the women's story sounded more like a cruel joke than anything they could really believe in or in which to find hope. As readers, we are told that they had just lost their friend, their teacher, the very one they hoped would be the Messiah, the one they had hoped would make everything right. And now these ladies, these joyous, excited women are saying that Jesus had appeared to them, that Jesus was raised from the dead, that Jesus was alive.

It was all too much to take in for these two. So these two disciples decided to leave. With each passing step, with each hurt emotion, their hearts and their minds become more and more closed off to the good news, more and more closed off to the possibility of new life.

However, on their journey to Emmaus, they encounter a stranger. Yet, there is something oddly familiar about this stranger. They cannot quite put their fingers on what it is but something about him reminds them of someone they used to know.

Luke goes on to tell us that as night begins to fall and as these two disciples get close to Emmaus, they invite this oddly familiar stranger to stay with them. And then, a funny thing happens...the Risen Christ breaks through all of their hurt, breaks through their frustration, and opens their hearts. He meets them in that very moment and welcomes them as his very own.

We are told that the disciples recognize this stranger as Jesus when he takes a loaf of bread, blesses it, and breaks it for them. Their eyes are opened and their hearts were healed. Through these few simple words, these disciples are transformed. They realize that it all wasn't just an idle tale. Here they were, experiencing the Risen Christ, right there in their midst.

No longer are their hearts closed off to the hope given to them by their Lord. In the breaking of the bread, in the hearing of God's word, they remember the promises which Jesus gave to them. He told them that they would never be lonely. They remember Jesus' words of comfort and hope, words that remind them that even after he is gone, whenever two or three are gathered, Jesus would be there as

well. They remember how Jesus would tell them about the unconditional love of God through the stories of God's saving acts, testifying to God's grace and God's mercy now and forevermore.

Their eyes are opened through the simple acts of breaking bread, and by sharing their stories of Jesus. Their hearts are opened as they remember the Story of God's goodness and grace. Jesus breaks through their doubt, their frustration, their hurt, through their tunnel vision to show them that he was there all along. Just like he does for the rest of us who were not at the Empty Tomb on that first Easter morning.

You see, that's the power of the resurrection. It changes us. It transforms us. It reframes our narrative. It brings us to the heart of the matter...how to become the people God calls us to be as we share God's grace and love with others.

And to do that, to become that, to live out the promises of the resurrection here and now, as people of faith, we are called to be open...to open our eyes, to open our hearts, to be open to meeting the Kingdom of God at work in our world as we let the rest of the world know that the story of God's love and grace is not an idle tale. As we show the rest of the world that being the Church, that being the Body of Christ, that being disciples of the Risen Savior was never about the

buildings or the programs. Rather, that it has always been about the Spirit of God moving in and among us, bringing us back to life. Amen.