

“Walk to Emmaus”

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 too many of us sitting in the church, even for us, the very ones who have experienced the mystery and holiness of God in our 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 understand that we, as people who were not there at the Empty tomb on that first Easter morning, we, 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 as post Easter morning people to take a deeper look at this story. Here is what we know: 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 decide 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. What made these ladies so special that Jesus came to them and not all the disciples? Why did Jesus choose to see just these few and not see everyone? Why didn't Jesus hang around the empty tomb until all the disciples could be there to find him and to see him once more?

All of it was just too much: the stories, the joy, the frustration, the doubt, the hurt, the anger. So these two disciples decide 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, their journey to a place which offers them safety, which offers them refuge, on this journey to a place where they don't have to hear any more of this impossible news, 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.

This stranger greets them. And again, there is something oddly familiar about his words. His words remind them of things that Jesus used to say...but wait, Jesus is gone. Yet there is still something familiar about this stranger. Their friend, Jesus used to say similar things to what this stranger is sharing with them along this journey. Jesus used to always talk about God's saving acts ...but wait, Jesus is gone.

Now as readers, we know what is going on but Luke continues his story. He leaves these two disciples in doubt and uncertainty, something we begin to question... “How can they not see that this stranger is Jesus, right there in front of them? How do they not realize that it is Jesus, talking with them, meeting them along this journey? How can these two disciples not see what is right in front of their face?

In that moment, we realize the brilliance of Luke’s writing. Luke has turned the tables on us. Luke has turned our questions back on us. As people living in a post Easter morning world, we find ourselves answering our own questions... “How can we not see Jesus in our midst? Luke tells us to open our eyes, to open our hearts and see.

As the possibilities of new life for the rest of us begin to sink in, Luke tells us that as night begins to fall and as these two disciples get close to their comfort zone in 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 were 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 that Jesus gave to them. He told them that they would never be lonely. They remember Jesus' words of comfort and hope that even after he was gone, whenever two or three were 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.

These two disciples who had closed themselves off from God's gift of good news were now experiencing the Risen Christ in new yet oddly familiar way. They were experiencing the good news now as people brought back to hope once more. They were experiencing the Risen Christ as they remembered and shared the Word

of God, as they broke bread with one another...acts of love, gifts given to them by a God who loves them more than they could ever imagine.

As ones who worship a Risen Savior, the resurrection become real for these disciples in that moment...all because they remembered, all because they accepted Jesus' invitation to come to the table and share in God's grace and love. No longer was the resurrection something they had just heard about from others. No longer was it simply an idle tale. In the hearing of God's word, in the breaking of bread, the power and love of the resurrection become real for these two disciples, just like it does for us today.

As ones who live in a post-Easter world, Luke wants the rest of us to look beyond the empty tomb and realize that we did not missed our chance to experience the Risen Christ. Each and every day, we are given opportunity to meet him. Every time we engage in studying, in remembering, in reflecting, in sharing the Word of God, we encounter the Risen Savior. Every time two or three are gathered, we encounter the Risen Lord. Every time we break bread together as disciples of Christ, it becomes abundantly clear that the resurrection is not just an idle tale. It becomes clear that it is not something someone else experienced and we have only heard about from others.

By sharing God's word with others, through the experience of sharing a meal, as people of faith, we let the world know just how transformative and life

giving the resurrection really is for us as who live in a post-modern, post-Easter, post-church kind of world. It becomes our way of telling this world over and over again that death and darkness will not have the last word.

I always find it interesting that these two disciples, as they are walking to Emmaus, ask Jesus "Are you the only one who doesn't know about what was happening in Jerusalem? I say this because nowadays in the Church evangelism is such a dirty word. No one likes to talk about their faith. It is too personal. We might say something wrong and offend someone. So we don't talk about it....and yet we wonder why so many people in our community still think the resurrection is an idle tale.

Now please don't hear me say that I'm asking all of us to go stand on the street corners with signs, shouting at the top of our lungs, telling all who might listen about our faith.

What I find interesting about this question the disciples posed to Jesus is that Luke knew that there were lots of people in Jerusalem and yes, lots of other places who didn't know what had been happening in Jerusalem at this point in the story. Yet, unlike Matthew, after the Empty Tomb, Luke doesn't give the Great commission. He doesn't tell us as post-Easter people to go and make disciples of all nations.

Instead, he wants us to realize that it is not enough for us to just tell people about the resurrection. We must share its power to heal with others. Because, the power of the resurrection is not about the telling. It is about experiencing it in our lives. As followers of the Risen Christ, we must live out the life changing power of God's grace and love through our words and our actions. It is not enough for us to tell people how to be disciples. We must also show them how by inviting the Holy into the ordinary moments of lives and allowing the resurrection to transform us into the people God created and calls us to be.

Or let me say it this way. In the words of the poet Madeleine L'engle, "We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.

Now I'll admit this would be a great point in the sermon for a story, a story that drives my point home. But I'll be honest, I've got nothing. As I scrambled to figure something out, I realized that the Holy Spirit has given me an out.

You see, the story of how light overcomes darkness is not done. There is still more to experience and share. There are still some right here in our own community who think the resurrection is an idle tale. There are still opportunities for others to meet the Risen Christ along their journeys as we share the story of how God's love overcomes death.

All we have to do is be open...open our eyes, to open our hearts, 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. All we have to do is show the rest of the world a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it. May it be so. Amen.