

“What Comes Next is Very Important”

Luke 24: 36-48

This week, we come to the conclusion of the Gospel of Luke and again, we discover a post-Easter story. I find it interesting that in this season of new beginnings, graduations, retirements, end of school year celebrations, I find it interesting how the reading of Scripture lines up with the season of our lives. Just like the disciples, how at the transition moments of our lives, we find ourselves asking “What’s next? What does the future hold for me? Where does the next part of the journey lead?”

Our story this morning answers these questions from the faith perspective for us. As we read this text, we realize that this particular story has the same themes as last week’s “Walk to Emmaus”. It even includes some of the same people, the disciples and their companions. In our text, we find this group sitting around talking about what has happened in their recent experience. They are at a crossroads on their faith journey. They are trying to figure out what their next steps will be as ones who follow the Risen Christ. They are asking themselves “What’s next?”

As I have thought about the various moments of transition we experience in our lives, the various transitions we experience in our churches, I have come to

realize that too many times, when we ask these particular questions, they seem larger than life. They can be overwhelming, leaving us paralyzed with fear. Too often when we come to these crossroads of transition, we become so trapped in the darkness of the unknown that there is no way we can ever contemplate let alone imagine what the future may hold for us. So, instead of moving forward, we become stuck. We become closed off. We become unable to dream, unable to vision the possibilities of new life which the future really does hold for us, just waiting for us to discover them...if only, we tell ourselves, if only we had the courage to take that first step.

Now, let me say I honestly don't think that in times of transition, the beginning of moving out of the unknown darkness, the beginning of moving beyond the fear which has us trapped is just a matter of saying to ourselves, "Buck up Buttercup" and magically we will find the courage to do so. No, that way of thinking does a disservice to us. It goes counter to everything we have been taught and experienced as people of faith. And more importantly, it ignores the very real power which fear has to hold us, to trap us, to keep us closed in.

No what I saying and what I believe is that when moments such as these, moments of new beginnings, moments when fear maybe has clouded our vision, in moments like these, what I am saying and what I believe is that as people of faith,

the Gospel narrative offers us a different way. It offers us a reminder that death and darkness do not have the last word.

That's why we need stories like this one to shake us up, to wake us up, to offer us hope so that we will be open to the very real presence of God at work in our midst. We need reminders of how we can and we do encounter the Risen Christ in our lives so that we are ready and able to receive his peace. So that we can and will gain the courage from these experiences to truly become the very real, the very living, moving, breathing Body of Christ here on Earth for all of God's children.

Or let me say it this way....This past week, I was spending a lot time at Lexington Theological Seminary as part of the Search committee for their new Academic Dean. It was interesting to realize that, although the candidates asked different questions, at some point in the interview process, all the candidates, all of them asked in some form or another, the same question..."What does the next five years hold for LTS?

Now, there were various answers given by the faculty and alums to this particular "What's next" question. Each group sharing their own understanding of what the next steps will be for LTS from their perspective and view point. And usually the all answers to this what's next question could be boiled down to one

single statement... “LTS will continue its journey of innovation as we prepare pastors for the Church.” I’m paraphrasing a bit but you get the general idea. A great thoughtful answer to this question for LTS and for many of our other faith institutions who find themselves facing an unknown future, asking themselves, “What’s next?”

But I have to be honest, and please don’t tell LTS I am saying this because after all, I still need and want to graduate with my DMin. But I realized that along with this great answer to the now what question, there was a disconnect to how we live out this vision in the present reality. It was almost like we have forgotten to ask the second part of the “now what” question which: How are we doing just that? So really what LTS, what Midway Christian church, what we as people of faith, should be asking ourselves is: “Where do we see ourselves in the next few years and how as followers of the Risen Christ, how are we living out this vision currently in our present reality?”

This disconnect between vision and present reality was brought home to me through an email I received while waiting for the various candidates’ interviews. On Thursday morning, I opened an email, telling me that our office had received a call for assistance. A couple had recently moved to our area and they needed help. Now, knowing what was going on in my life at the moment, knowing that I wasn’t physically in Midway at the moment, I could have easily ignored this email,

pretending that I was too busy at the moment to answer the request. I could have easily told myself that this request could wait until I was back in the office. After all it didn't affect me personally. And there are other organizations within our community who could help in this type of situation.

I could have done all that Or...Or I could find space and time to be the Body of Christ for someone in need. Which is what, as a person of faith, not just as a minister, practicing what she preaches, but being a person of faith first and foremost, finding space and time to be the Body of Christ for someone in need is what I am called, what we are called to do. We are called to be witnesses to the wider, broader vision of the Kingdom of God as a life changing, life giving power in this world as we work together as the Body of Christ to bring healing and wholeness to all of God's children in real and very present ways.

In case you are wondering and worried about what I did, please have faith in your pastor. I answered the call and I'm glad I did. Through this phone call, I was able to make connections within our community for this couple, allowing the love of God to surround them, and yes hopefully, through my willingness to create space for grace, help bring them out of the fear they were experiencing in that moment. Maybe through opening my heart, opening my eyes to God's Kingdom very much at work in this world, I was able to push away the darkness of the unknown for this couple for just a little while. It may not have been much but when

this person called back, thanking me for talking her, thanking me for connecting her with Ken Glass, our pharmacist who does more for this town than anyone will ever know. When this person called back, we both knew we had encountered the Risen Christ and the vision of the Kingdom of God at that moment become a very real present reality for both of us to experience and enjoy.

So many times, it is easy for us to get caught up in our own cares, in our own worries, in our own needs so much so that we miss what we are called to do. Sometimes we get so caught up in the wider vision of what is out there, that we forget to be present right here, right now as the very real Body of Christ, bringing healing and wholeness for all of God's children here in this moment.

Please hear, I'm not telling everyone this story so that I can feel better about myself. I'm sharing it this morning because it was a humbling experience for me. I can't imagine the courage it took for this person to make the phone call, to take the first step into the unknown and ask for help. It would have been so easy for this couple to become trapped in fear, trapped in worry, trapped in the unknown, that they could have started to think that no one cared, that no one would help out. It would have been so easy for this couple to believe that they were all alone at this crossroads of life. Yet, with a little faith, and a little hope, a connection was made and grace was experienced by all.

Like I said, I can't imagine the courage it took for this person to make the phone call, asking for help, but I'm glad this person did. Because, truth be told, this person's courage reminded me again, that if "Jesus wasn't bluffing about his resurrection, then we are correct in assuming that he wasn't bluffing about all the other stuff either. You know, the other stuff about telling us how we are to treat each other, the other stuff about loving our enemies and being a light of love to and for the world. If Jesus was telling the truth about overcoming the darkness, then he was telling us the truth when he called us to be his followers, when he told us that the "what's next" for us is to be witnesses to wider vision of God's grace present in this world while we work to bring healing and wholeness for all of God's children.

As ones who witness to a Risen Savior, a Savior who showed us a new way, who showed us death and darkness do not have the last word, as ones who are the Body of Christ here on Earth, we were the first ones to experience hope. We were the first ones to see it, to hear about it. We were the first ones who knew about the possibilities of new life that were out there, just waiting for us to discover them.

All it took was the transformational, life-giving power of God's love, a power which centers us, which restores us, to gave us the courage to be the very real, the very living, moving, breathing Body of Christ here on Earth for all of God's children. And now it is time for us to realize as we move forward letting the vision of God's Kingdom becoming a reality here on Earth, as we let this vision

guide us, it is time for us to realize what we do now, what we do next is very important. Now is the time for us to reach out to the hurt and broken in our community, to share God's grace and love with others, to welcome all to God's table, to create space and time for all to encounter the Risen Christ in our midst.

Because you see, the only way the story is going to continue is if we find the courage to become the people God created and calls us to be, people who realize that the Jesus who taught us to break bread with the people others ignored is the same as the Eternal Christ who brought us new life. We cannot separate them from each other. They are one and the same. And now, they are waiting for us to take the vision of God's grace at work in this world and make it the present reality for all of God's children.

May it be so. Amen.