

“While in their Joy, They were disbelieving”

Luke 24: 36b-48

We are now in the season of Easter and will continue to be so until Pentecost, fifty days from now. Throughout the season of Easter, as people of faith, we will hear the various stories, telling us of the disciples’ encounters with the Risen Christ. Luke and John are the Gospel writers most fascinated with these encounters. And surprise, surprise, these encounters with the Risen Christ always seem to involve food.

These stories serve to remind us as people of faith that the story of the resurrection, the story of God's love and grace, did not and does not end at the empty tomb. The disciples are sent out into the world to share the good news, to help others experience the presence of the Kingdom of God in their midst. These post resurrection stories try to answer for us as people of faith, the questions of “What’s next? What does the future hold for us as a community of faith? Where does the next part of our journey lead?”

Our story this morning is no different. In our text, we find this group sitting around talking about what happened during their recent faith experience when they encountered the Risen Christ on the Road to Emmaus. Their experience with the Risen Christ pushes them beyond their current crossroads on their faith journey, to

begin wondering about what's next for them. This encounter with the Risen Christ starts them thinking about what their next steps will be as ones who follow the Risen Christ.

As I have thought about this question of "What's next" as it pertains to our post Easter experiences as people of faith, as it pertains to our conversations and mission as communities of faith, 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 on our journeys of faith, 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, possibilities which the future really does hold for us, just waiting for us to discover them... only if, only if we have the courage to take that first step.

Now, let me say I honestly don't think that in times when we arrive at certain crossroads on our journeys of faith that for us to move beyond the fear which has trapped us is as simple as saying to ourselves, have courage and then magically we will 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, how we do encounter the Risen Christ in our lives here and now so that we will be open to what the future may hold. We gain courage from these experiences so that we can truly become the very real, the very living, moving, breathing Body of Christ here on Earth for all of God's children. These encounters help us realize that Kingdom work is never either or. Rather it is always both and.

Or let me say it this way...This past week, I was in and out of the office quite a bit because well, Woodford County was on Spring Break and it was the week after Holy Week. Nothing much was going on in the office so I took some time away. However, even though I wasn't in the office very much this week, opportunities to both engage the Kingdom of God here and now while also inviting me to vision how this opportunities will shape the future of this community of

faith, opportunities for both/and Kingdom work found me in wonderful and extraordinary ways.

It all started with an email to Northside Elementary, the elementary school here in town. Our Green Chalice team has been interested in creating a bench out of plastic bottle caps for a while now but just didn't know how to get started. So I reached out to the school, knowing just last year, the students at the school collected about 300 lbs. of bottle caps which would be converted into a bench for their school. A teacher responded back and shared that she was just overwhelmed with the project since it was just her organizing it. But her story doesn't stop there. Her house caught fire last summer. She has moved 7 times since then, dragging these 300 lbs. of plastic caps with her every time she moved.

So she offered to just give our Green Chalice Team the caps so that we could create a bench for the church as a way to say thanks for all that Midway Christian Church does for the school.

In talking with our Green Chalice Team, that arrangement, while great, just didn't feel right. The kids had done all the world. They should be receiving the bench. So our first thought was how can we make this happen? So after a few back and forth emails, our Green Chalice team offered to sponsor Northside in helping complete this bench project.

I know that this doesn't sound like much, but for that teacher, for the students, this connection, this partnership becomes a way for the Kingdom of God to be made real and present here and now for our community. The overwhelming thank you from this teacher is evidence of that. Northside gets a bench. Our Green Chalice Team gets a lesson in how it is done so that we can duplicated it again for our community. It is a Win Win for everyone. This connection allows us to both engage the very present Kingdom of God here and now while also inviting us to vision out the various ways our Green Chalice Team can come along side of the students at Northside in the work of taking care of God's creation.

But the Kingdom moments didn't stop there. During Holy Week, the church was contacted about hosting a baby baptism. I shared with this person that baby baptisms are not normally our practice, that we usually do baby dedications. We talked for a bit and agreed to meet after Easter to plan out the service.

We met this past Thursday. In our conversation, I learned the dad has been diagnosed with a reoccurring cancer. At that time, he was currently in the hospital after becoming sick after his last treatment. The family wasn't even sure he would be out of the hospital to make the baby dedication. The mom shared that they had lived in Midway for two years but didn't really know anyone. They felt completely disconnected and overwhelmed with life right now. She reached out to a Christian Church, because that is the denomination her husband claims. He really wanted,

needed this dedication done as a lifeline for him. As I sat with this mom, simply listening to her tell me her story, I was humbled by this Kingdom moment.

My guess is that this family will not be regular attenders but that is not the point. In that moment, I was reminded again of why we do what we do as people of faith. We live out this vision of healing and wholeness in our present reality, bearing witness to the life changing, life giving power at work in this world, a power that is bringing hope and connection to all of God's children in real and transforming ways. So yesterday, I did my first baby baptism and then spent some time in prayer and thought afterwards, visioning and wondering how we could come alongside this family. I have an idea but it is still percolating. This encounter is helping me to think about ways we can come alongside our neighbors right here in our community who are hungry, not necessarily hungry for food, but hungry for connection and community.

This week I was reminded that so many times, it is easy for us to get caught up in our own cares, in our own worries, in our own needs 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. All these Kingdom moments made me realize that 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 were witnesses 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 also the first ones to experience hope. We were also the first ones to see it, to hear about it. We were also 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 working to bring God’s Kingdom a reality here on Earth, as we let this vision guide us, it is also

time for us to realize what we do now, what we do in this moment is very important. Now is the time for us to both reach out to the hurt and broken in our community, sharing God's grace and love with others as we welcome all to God's table while also hoping and praying for God's Kingdom to come on Earth as it is in heaven.

Because you see, the only way the story is going to continue is if we find the courage to become the people God created, the people God calls us to be, people who realize that the Jesus who taught us to break bread with the people others ignored is also the same Eternal Christ who brought us new life. We cannot separate them from each other. They are one and the same. And now, both 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.