

Third Sunday of Easter/April 30, 2017

Psalm 116; Luke 24:13-35;

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"In the Guise of . . ."

Here we are, 2 weeks after Easter Sunday, the third Sunday of Easter, and 15 days into the great 50 day celebration of the Season of Easter! Indeed, this is to be a season of celebration but also one of learning, and of paying close attention to the stories of the resurrection, and the presence of Christ in the hearts and lives of the disciples as the church was about to be established! How exciting is that?!!!

Today we have this fabulous story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. While the gospel of Mark includes a mention of this event, the author of Luke is the only one who gives us the full disclosure, the details of what happened. It is part of the tradition that tells of Jesus' appearances after the crucifixion. And at House Church this past week, there was so much interest in the *resurrected Jesus* and his change in appearance, that I thought I would go back and give you a brief description of all the various portrayals in scripture of the Easter event.

The first record of the resurrection events come from Paul, around 55 AD, in I Corinthians (15:3-8), where he recites the tradition, that *Jesus was raised on the third day, appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve, then to "more than 500 brethren at one time", then to James, then to all the apostles, and then finally to himself, Paul.*

The gospel accounts include Matthew's (28:1-20) telling of Mary Magdalene and another Mary, who find the tomb empty, have a vision of angels, and then meet the resurrected Jesus, *they do recognize him*, laying hold of his feet, and then going to tell the rest of the disciples. They all go and meet Jesus on a mountain in Galilee, where they worship him.

In Mark, there are 2 endings. First (16:1-8), it is Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, who go to the tomb with spices to anoint the body. They find a young man/angel at the open tomb, who tells them Jesus will meet them in Galilee, and that they should go and tell Peter and the disciples. But they *don't!* They are too afraid, and they say nothing to anyone! And that's how the first telling of Easter in Mark ends. Now after that, there is a *second* ending (16:9-20) that was added later that says Jesus appeared, early on the first day of the week (Easter Sunday), to Mary Magdalene, and that she went and told the others, but they did not believe her. Then, it says he appeared *"in another form"* to two on the road in the country (our Emmaus story) and they told the group, but were also not believed. And finally, he appeared to the 11 and he scolds them for their unbelief, after which he goes out and ascends to heaven.

In John (20:1-31), we have the traditional telling of the Easter story, with Mary Magdalene going to the tomb, finding it empty, running to tell Peter and an unnamed disciple, who run and find the empty tomb, but then return home. Mary, meanwhile, stays at the tomb, crying the loss of her friend Jesus' body, and is spoken to by some angels, and then by one whom she assumes to be the gardener. But it is not until he speaks her name, *"Mary"*, that she *recognizes* him. He tells her to go and tell the others, and she does. Then, at evening on that day (Easter Sunday), as the disciples are gathered behind locked doors, Jesus appears to them, saying *"Peace be to you"* and showing them his wounds in his hands and his side. However, Thomas is

not there then, and so does not believe, but 8 days later, he witnesses the resurrected Jesus with the others in that same place, touches his hands and side, and believes. Then John has another ending (21:1-25), added later, that tells about Peter and some of the other disciples who go fishing on the Sea of Tiberias. Jesus is on the shore, shouts out to them where to catch the fish, and when they all get to shore with the big catch, *none seem to recognize him* but somehow "*They knew*" it was Jesus, as he shares the breakfast with them. And it ends with a long discussion between Jesus and Peter about Peter's love and dedication to him.

Finally, here in Luke (24:1-53), we have "*the women*", none whose names are mentioned until later as Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James and others, who go to the tomb with spices, finding it empty but complete with 2 angels. They go and tell the disciples who hear their words as an "*idle tale*." Then we have our passage for today about the 2 on the road to Emmaus, where Jesus walks and talks with them, but they *don't recognize* him until the breaking of the bread. When they get back to the group in Jerusalem, they are told that Jesus had appeared to Simon, and then he appears to all of them right there. But they are fearful, thinking him a spirit. So he shows them his wounds, invites them to touch him, and asks for something to eat. They give him fish and he eats it. He reminds them of what he taught them, and then takes them out to Bethany, where he ascends into heaven.

Last week Kate preached on that passage from John. She pointed out that in order for the grieving disciples to move from fear and sadness to rejoicing, Jesus needed to show them his wounds. Some *action* was required for them to come to belief. She said that "*it is our shared times of suffering that knit a community together ever stronger than before. What the disciples endured with Jesus and the suffering they shared with one another is what made them the strong, compassionate, witnessing, teaching, and healing community that birthed the church.*" John was lifting up the importance of *Jesus'* suffering, and their *shared* suffering, that made his presence known.

In Luke, this story also tells what makes Jesus presence known. Luke begins by introducing us to a person named Cleopas. This is a *Greek* name and using it may have been a device to connect to Luke's community/s of Greek and Jewish Christians, perhaps in Antioch or another Hellenistic culture, for whom this gospel was written. It may have also been a real person who many of them knew or had heard about. There is also a tradition that suggests this may have been the brother of Joseph, the husband of Mary. But it is the other person, the *unnamed one*, that intrigues us. We can surmise that this may have been a spouse or a friend of Cleopas, traveling to their home in Emmaus. It could be Luke himself. But what is also possible, is that Luke leaves this person unnamed because he is *inviting us* to step into that person's sandals, to be that person in the story, to have that personal experience of the risen Christ. To tell us not only how those two experienced him, but how the early church, Luke's own community, would experience him as well. So each part of the story seems to have something to teach us.

When Jesus meets them on the road, he comes to them in their grief and confusion. A reminder how in our deepest need, Christ comes to us. Then, we learn that he is *not recognizable* to them, but takes the form of a stranger. The church would use this image of *Christ in the stranger's guise*, as a reminder to be kind and welcoming to those we do not know.

As Jesus hears their sorrow, he then *teaches* them on the way, opening the scriptures to them, so that they might have understanding of who the Christ was to be. In the church, *knowledge of the scriptures* and an emphasis on *learning* has long been paramount.

Then as they reach their destination, their home, he seems to be going on. We are reminded that *Christ's presence is not a given*. We are allowed a choice. *The disciples chose to invite him in*. If we want Christ in our lives, we must be *intentional* about *opening our hearts and lives* to make room for his Spirit. And indeed, the church has always stressed the importance of hospitality and the need to welcome all into our midst. As they welcomed him, so are we to welcome each other, welcome all, making room for the presence of Christ that we see in every other person. When we do that, we thereby again experience the Christ presence in our own lives.

Then, Luke reminds us of Jesus' words and acts that he gave to the disciples the night before he died. After being welcomed in, he sits at table with them, and shares the same language of the Lord's Supper, "*he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.*" It is in that act, that their *eyes are opened* and they *recognize* who he is. It is in that *sacrament*, in the bread and the cup that we will share next Sunday, that he avails himself to us, as well, and through which we continue to know his presence.

Then Luke tells us how, once they *recognized* him, how their spirits were lifted, how they recalled "*were not our hearts burning while he was talking to us on the road, opening the scriptures to us?*" And then, what was their strongest desire? It was to race back to their friends and share with them the good news! The church is not meant to be a holding place for the gospel, a bank vault in which to keep it safe and hidden. We are meant to be telling everyone about what we know, sharing not only the message, but the presence of Christ, his love and compassion, his acceptance, his forgiveness, his welcome. For it is in the *community*, in the presence of the gathered faithful, *that we become the body of Christ*. It is here, in *our community*, that Christ is most present to and with us.

These are the lessons of the Emmaus road story and all those stories about the resurrected Christ. It is a paradox really. If we wish to have Christ in our lives, we need to invite him in, open our homes, our hearts to him. But that means looking for him in the stranger, the outcast, the one who has little to give us, the one with whom we have nothing in common. In the unexpected people and places. In looking for his presence in others, we will find that he is already making his presence in us.

As we celebrate this Easter season, may we *know*, may we *become*, the *presence of Christ* with and for each other. Amen.