



Sunday, May 3, 2020

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Luke 24:13-35

Then their eyes were opened

INTRODUCTION:

As Carrie just told us, today's Gospel story is about 2 disciples trying to figure out what just happened to them. One minute they were marching into Jerusalem with Jesus through a sea of worshipers, waving palm branches and shouting hosanna. Within the week, it all went sideways. Jesus was falsely accused, arrested, convicted, publicly humiliated and brutally executed. It was inconceivable, but Jesus had been killed. He was placed in a tomb. The disciples were understandably terrified and confused. Fearing for their own lives, they hid out in a room somewhere. Certainly, the Romans or Sanhedrin be after them next. Then, Sunday morning came and the women reported that the stone had been rolled away and that there was no body in the tomb.

Within one week, these first followers of Jesus saw their whole world fall apart. All their plans and expectations vaporized on that cross. They self-isolated in fear and found themselves suddenly adrift on a dark sea of uncertainty. Locked away, they waited, not knowing what was next and tried to make sense of what this would all mean from this point forward.

Two of the disciples couldn't stay put. They needed to do something, so they took a walk. Not a bad idea when you need to think through some things.

Before we hear the story, let us pray.

Ever-present God, Your ways are always surprising and unexpected, yet Your Word is a lamp that guides our feet, a light along the darkened path ahead. Illuminate our hearts this morning. In this time of confusion and disorientation, may Your Word give us insight, understanding and hope. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to You, our rock and our redeemer. AMEN

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In Luke's Gospel, this is the very first sighting of the risen Christ, and he comes to two of his followers that we have never heard of before or will again. Jesus is nothing, if not surprising. Hear this reading from the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Luke...

## SCRIPTURE: Luke 24:13-35

That same day [that the tomb was found empty] two of [the disciples] were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their

talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was.

He asked, "What's this you're discussing so intently as you walk along?"

They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend. Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said, "Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn't heard what's happened during the last few days?"

He said, "What has happened?"

They said, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word, blessed by both God and all the people. Then our high priests and leaders betrayed him, got him sentenced to death, and crucified him. And we had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about to deliver Israel. And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn't find his body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn't see Jesus."

Then he said to them, "So thick-headed! So slow-hearted! Why can't you simply believe all that the prophets said? Don't you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?" Then he started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to him.

They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on but they pressed him: "Stay and have supper with us. It's nearly evening; the day is done." So he went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared.

Back and forth they talked. "Didn't we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?"

They didn't waste a minute. They were up and, on their way, back to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and their friends gathered together, talking away: "It's really happened! The Master has been raised up—Simon saw him!"

Then the two went over everything that happened on the road and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.

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These two disciples were whirling from the events of Holy Week, Good Friday and the day of resurrection. The experience was fresh... "That very day." We're talking on the same evening as of Jesus resurrection. These guys didn't know what to do next, but they needed to do something, so they took a walk. It's what many of us do when we need to think through some things. I know a lot of us are finding walks very therapeutic in this time of isolation and uncertainty about the future. And I also think there is more here in this story that we may find helpful in our current struggle to reorient a way forward out of the pandemic.

The first thing is that after any traumatic or high-emotion experience, we need time to quietly settle and evaluate. We need to step back and process what happened to try to make sense of it all. We yearn to see fit the pieces and parts together.

For those of us who follow Jesus, we trust that 'God works all things together for good' but how does our faith fold into this experience? It's okay not to come up with answers, but it is important to take time to quietly reflect and be open to what God is doing now.

Secondly, one of the best ways of sorting out confusion and uncertainty is to talk about it with someone. That's exactly what these two are doing. 'They were deep in conversation.' When we put our thoughts into words and articulate our questions and feelings, things begin to take shape. That's why talk therapy is so effective. Our anxieties thrive on what we keep inside. I've heard it said that we are only as sick as our secrets. Our unarticulated fears expand out of control until we openly and honestly talk them through. Notice how Jesus doesn't just launch into his explanation of what just happened. He first asks the two to tell in their own words what their experience has been. They share their disappointment honestly and transparently. Cleopas says, "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."

Effectively working through trauma involves not only articulating what happened but also how you honestly feel about what happened. So many people I speak with don't want to admit how difficult and disappointing this quarantine has been. They feel like so many people have it so much worse that their own pain is invalid by comparison and they should just be grateful. We do need to recognize the suffering of others and gratitude is a strong weapon against self-pity, but we must also learn to validate how we truly feel. Telling yourself or anyone else that you shouldn't feel that way simply denies what is really hurting. Dismissing our emotions, for any reason, only gives them more power. There is no chance of transforming our pain if we don't honestly articulate how we are hurting. If we don't transform our pain, we will always end up transmitting our pain in all sorts of destructive ways.

The third thing I notice in this story is when they explained to this foreigner walking with them the things that had happened, it becomes clear that they held so tightly to their religious understanding about the Messiah. When that all vaporized on the cross they were shattered. As disciples of Jesus, they certainly knew the scriptures - but neither

religious tradition nor scriptural knowledge helped them recognize Jesus right in front of them. In fact, they were blinded by their religious certainty, making it impossible to see beyond their own expectations. They failed to understand how the path of redemption is not a steady march toward blissful victory, but rather a painful and frightening journey through the valley of the shadow of death. Jesus explains this sweeping and consistently repeated story found over and over again in scripture, a meta-story that is also reflected in all of nature and validated even in our own life experiences. Every life suffers and succumbs to death in order to rise again to new life. This is the redemption cycle in which the true Messiah reveals the way through and beyond the forces of death, rising to new life. In doing so, he liberated all humanity and creation from the tyranny of death as the final ending. Jesus spells this out to them - and still they don't recognize him.

This brings me to my final point. Words are not enough to transform us. Words must be followed by action. These two disciples, who were deeply suffering in profound grief, were not so self-absorbed that they couldn't invite this "foreigner" to stay with them. They may not have recognized Jesus walking with them but they did not forget his teaching. They welcomed the stranger. It was this loving hospitality that led to that moment when Jesus took the bread, he blessed it, broke it and gave it to them. That is the moment when their eyes were opened. It was a tangible act of loving outreach that opened their eyes to recognize the risen Christ was sitting right in front of them.

Every time we reenact the eucharist - this holy sacrament of communion, we take, bless, break and give, just as Jesus taught us. No matter what the condition of our soul is, we are invited to participate in this blessing that Jesus left for us. Through the sacrament of communion, the resurrected Christ becomes more than one incarnate prophet from 2000 years ago. In the breaking of the bread we are all invited to physically and spiritually experience Christ - present among and in all of us. Abstraction becomes tangible and real.

This is the good news of the Gospel. The resurrected Christ walks beside us. We don't have to do anything special to earn his presence or love. God remains with us whether we recognize him or not.

In our time of dislocation, disappointment, confusion and uncertainty, like the two disciples, we also should go for long walks, share the fragile places of our soul with someone, remain open to what new thing God is doing among us and always remember that we follow in the way of Jesus, who welcomed the stranger, fed the hungry, set the captives free and showed us that love is always and only the way to new life.

As we break bread and take the cup together in just a few minutes, we will remember that Christ has died, Christ has risen and Christ will come again. May our hearts burn within us and may our eyes be opened. Even now, Jesus walks beside us.

AMEN!