

Can't You See?

April 12, 2020 - Easter

UMCG

I love this story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus set on Resurrection day. It was probably late afternoon, after the women disciples had witnessed the empty tomb in the morning and shared their experience with the other disciples. If you think about it, today's story unfolds in two settings: A journey on a road. And a meal in someone's home. Actually, both have been common settings as Luke's story of Jesus has unfolded. Early in Luke's Gospel, the disciples are depicted as setting off on a journey, a journey of faith—from the day Jesus first called them, to the day he commissioned them to be his witnesses after his resurrection. Nearly two thirds of Luke's Gospel is devoted to the journey of Jesus and his disciples from Galilee in the north to Jerusalem in the south.

As for meal scenes, Luke dishes up far more meals than any other Gospel. Meals serve as settings where people experience Jesus's power to heal, forgive and show compassion. Indeed, it is on the road and in the sequence of meals that Jesus's true identity as Savior is gradually revealed, culminating in today's Easter story.

Today—Easter—we find ourselves in step with Jesus on a journey. A journey that leads us not only to Jesus himself, but to his church as well. Written between 80 – 90 CE (50 – 60 years after Jesus's death and resurrection), Luke's story operates on several levels. On one level it offers Luke's perspective on the earthly Jesus—his life, teachings, death and resurrection. On another level, Luke's story addresses the situation of Jesus's disciples, the "early church," at the time Luke wrote his gospel. Remember....Luke is addressing the needs of the faith community of Jesus's followers 50 to 60 years after the resurrection.

What were some of the early church's needs in 80 – 90 CE? Well, for starters, the church had only recently broken free from its mother religion, Rabbinic Judaism. As with any fledgling movement, the church to whom

Luke wrote needed to know who they were. As a new faith community, they also needed to know how they were to worship. The Road to Emmaus story helps them answer the question of identity (who are we?) and the question of liturgy (how are we to worship?).

Metaphorically, today's story answers the question of identity by asserting that the new religious community following Jesus is a pilgrim community. In other words, the church then, and now, is a pilgrim church, always on the road, always moving, always following its Lord. In short, they were...and we are to be—a living, active, dynamic movement...not a staid, inactive, half-dead institution! The church—back then—and now—is a pilgrim people. Followers of Jesus meet him, encounter him, not only along the way, but whenever two or three gather in his name to hear the Gospel read and preached, who share a sacred meal (holy communion) and who are then sent out to witness to their experience of the Risen Christ! That is who the early church was. And that is our identity—who we are today!

I don't know about you, but I can certainly identify with those two disciples in today's story as we are still in the midst of the corona virus pandemic. There are times when I have the urge to flee...to find some safe place, an Emmaus, away from the relentless news cycle and the recurring scenes on TV. Like those two disciples, I find myself bouncing in and out of fear and bewilderment. What just happened? Life isn't supposed to go this way, is it? In the midst of suffering, fear and death...like those two disciples...I ask not only "Why God?" but "Where are you Lord?" Like those two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, I think many of us are trying to make sense of our experiences, the experience of the pandemic... how to accept the unacceptable, the unthinkable. I must confess that I, too—like Cleopas and his friend—am not quick to recognize Jesus walking beside me, walking with me, present in my life. How about you?

Truth be told, even in so-called "normal times," it can be hard to recognize Jesus walking alongside us. Life has so many distractions...The daily grind: at work, raising our children, caring for elderly parents, bouts of sickness and loss. When we are ground down and worn out, we tend to carry on,

mechanically, unable to lift our eyes or our minds from the dust of the earthly road we are travelling. So we become spiritually blind, unaware of God's presence with us.

But the fact is, Jesus is still here. He's the unseen stranger, walking with us, listening to us...and if we are willing to listen to him, he reveals himself to us. As those two disciples spoke of the Cross, Jesus addressed their bewilderment and sorrow, and filled their hearts with courage and hope as he pointed them to God's self-revelation in the scriptures. Luke informs us that, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus explained to them what scripture said about himself". (I wish I would have been there for that Bible study led by Jesus himself!)

When the trio finally arrived at Emmaus, the disciples still had not recognized their Risen Lord. But he had won them over, and when invited he quickly accepted their invitation to dinner. A simple meal was placed on the table. The bread was there. Now was the time for Jesus, the risen Lord, to reveal himself to them. How did he do it? *He took bread...gave thanks...broke it...and gave it to them.* (You recognize those words spoken at every Holy Communion.) And as he broke the bread...they saw his hands! His nail-pierced hands! Instantly they recognized him! And instantly, he was gone!

This Easter story, the story of the Road to Emmaus, is a symbol...it is symbolic of our lives. It's a story about us! A story about rolling out of bed each morning. Having to face life again. Deal with the corona virus again. Shelter in place again. Adjust to teaching our kids at home and working from home. Facing life with all its joys and sorrows. It's about us—our lives. Yours and mine.

And it's a story about meeting the Risen Christ. Where? In the person of others, oft times strangers, who travel life's road with us. We encounter the Risen Christ when we read the scriptures alone, when we study the Bible with others, as we meet in small group discussions and support groups, and when we hear the Gospel read and preached in worship. We also

experience the Risen Christ as we gather round our tables...at home, and hopefully in the not-too-distant future, when we gather around his table, the Lord's Table, face to face for Holy Communion.

May we, today and in the days ahead, be like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus. May we give Jesus opportunities to talk to us. May we give him the chance to open our ears to hear him speak to us. May we give him the chance to open our eyes to see Jesus...the Risen Christ. And may our lives be transformed so that—like them—our hearts may burn, our eyes see so that we may open our mouths and bear witness to the reality and truth of our experience with the Risen Christ.

Christ is Risen!

Christ is Risen indeed!

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Rev. Rich Darr – Pastor, UMC of Geneva, IL

Today's Easter lesson is all about seeing Jesus in our lives and in our world today. And so we have asked several of our youth to share with us ways they have seen Jesus alive and at work in their world and in their lives...