

Walking and Talking Together
Psalm 19:12-18 & 57-64
Luke 24:13-35

I decided this year to do a little mini sermon series on the “after Easter Stories.” I intentionally skipped the Doubting Thomas one...I thought we might give poor Thomas a break this year! Instead I wanted to focus on two stories—Breakfast at the Lakeshore (which we considered last week) and The Road to Emmaus—because in my mind these two stories really talk about our relationship to Jesus post Easter, and they both give us clear pictures of how our lives are to be as Easter people. So lets now go together down that road to Emmaus.

Helping us to do that I turned to Rev. Marilyn Salmon, who is a professor of the New Testament at United Theological Seminary, and associate priest at St. Clements Episcopal Church in St. Paul Minnesota. She writes:

The Emmaus journey appears only in Luke and is sometimes called “the journey of every Christian.” It has all of the elements of the Christian life: discouragement, disappointment, doubt, risk, times of deep faith, the spirit of companionship, interpreting the scriptures, the presence of Christ in the sacraments, profound wonder and incomparable joy in telling others the good news of God made known in the risen Christ.

“Now on that same day ...” the story continues and connects us to what has just occurred. Two of them are walking away from Jerusalem discussing the things that happened that day. One of them is not named. The other, Cleopas, is not mentioned anywhere else among the disciples. The anonymity seems intentional. They were among those who were with Jesus in Galilee and came to Jerusalem with him.

In this way Luke invites us to identify with the un-named and unknown disciple. They could be any disciple — even you or I. The destiny, Emmaus, is interesting in that it is not mentioned anywhere else in the scriptures nor is it confirmed by archaeological evidence. Perhaps the destiny is less important than the journey itself.

Of course it is ironic that the two disciples don't recognize Jesus, and even ask him how he didn't know about the events of the past 3 days. The irony functions as a literary device for the reprisal of the events of Holy Week and Easter. We hear them from the experience of the disciples who do not yet know what we know. They tell their story: of Jesus, the prophet before God and all the people; their sense of betrayal by some of their leaders; the crucifixion; and their own devastated hopes. They tell the stranger the astonishing story the women told: the body gone, and the news the angels told that he was alive.

Jesus, the stranger, chides them for their lack of belief and proceeds to interpret the scriptures for them. He teaches them that the news the women told should not be surprising. The words here echo what the angels told the women in the tomb: "Remember how he told you..." The repetition and reminder what they were taught may cause us to wonder how they could forget so quickly. Or it might provoke our own awareness of the need to hear what we have heard again and again. The repetition may be for us.

There is an element of risk on this journey. We might miss it because we know the stranger is Jesus, but to the un-named and unknown travelers, he is still a stranger. It is night and it is late. They offered hospitality. In fact they urged him to stay with them. The stranger and guest then becomes Jesus the host. The words Jesus speaks echo the words spoken at the last supper Jesus shared with his disciples. We know them well, too, in the sacrament of bread and wine in which we experience the presence of Christ.

In the breaking of bread, the travelers recognize the stranger, and at that very moment he vanishes from their sight. They are not disturbed, as we might expect, but rather become fully aware that the stranger who was with them on the journey was indeed the risen Christ. On that very night, they returned to Jerusalem — all seven miles — to tell the others what had happened "on the road" and "in the breaking of the bread". With great joy they tell the good news the women had told them earlier that day. He has risen!"

Consider this for a moment. It is when Jesus does the most Jesus thing of all that everything changed for the 2 anonymous disciples. It was then they knew him. What is the most characteristic thing that Jesus did is

that you think of when you think of Jesus? Many would think of the cross. For others it might be preaching to a crowd or healing the sick. Some might think of him reigning in the sky with God. But in 3 of the 4 gospels (all but Matthew) the after Easter stories are of Jesus appearing to them while they were around the table—when they are fed, they recognize him.

By his body we are fed.

So how do we think about these stories in our daily lives? Well, first off, it is obvious as followers of Christ we are to be together. We are to gather to gather to eat and pray and worship God and when we do the Spirit will be among us. Remember the Holy Spirit came to the disciples at Pentecost where they had gathered to observe a religious holiday. According to Scriptures, Christian community is important—in fact you might say it is THE most important thing. We need to remember this as we go into this time of de-churching. We have to get together in SOME way. We must go on this journey of life TOGETHER.

Another point that I feel the Emmaus story illustrates is the idea that we are to discuss and talk out all these issues together. This is very keeping with Jewish tradition even to this day. It is not merely a blind acceptance of Scripture. Groups gather with rabbis to discuss and chew on Scripture passages, and sometimes these discussions get rather heated! But the idea is we learn more about what is being taught in the text if we talk about it and hash it out together, rather than just sitting by ourselves with our own viewpoint, reading the Bible. This is what good Bible Studies should be like, rather than just a teacher lecturing in a classroom like setting.

A while back I happened to see a webpage for another church, and they made a point to say they encouraged questions and discussion about Scripture and other issues—that those kind of discussions were encouraged and accepted rather than being shut down. They also made a point to say that it didn't matter where you were on your faith journey—from not sure to seasoned believer—that all were invited to journey with them. I thought this a very important statement to make. We all know churches who are otherwise. Is Potwin this open? I think we are as evidenced by the visitor we had a few weeks ago who asked

the question, "Do I have to be baptized to come here?" Of course not! Come on in! (and we can arrange a baptism if you wish!) But how do others know that about us? How can we let them know? That's the million-dollar question isn't it?

So as we journey from this place today, let us be open. Let us look for Jesus. Let us work to recognize him when we encounter him in the people and situations around us, whether it be a stranger on the lakeshore or walking down the road. Let us keep our eyes and ear and hearts open. Let us follow our mission to feed his lambs, and let us never stop thinking and discussing and praying about all he taught us, and let us share that good news with others, not only by what we say but also by what we do.

Let it be so Lord, Let it be so. In Jesus' name we ask it, Amen.