

April 19, 2015
Luke 24:13-35
Emmaus
Pastor Sally May

Luke 24:13-35 (NRSV) Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

I find this to be a really beautiful resurrection story.

When I close my eyes I can picture the scene of two people walking down this barren road, in shock, grieving, wondering what had just happened over the last days. And what did the empty tomb mean. An apparent stranger to them approaches, begins a conversation and continues to walk with them. And it ends with them seemingly all excited – “were not our hearts burning within us And that same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem” – It is as if life has returned.

The time they spent with the stranger was transformative. So what happened, what transformed these two people.

First, they shared what had happened to Jesus, their beloved friend, teacher, and hope for their future, with this apparent stranger – they shared their story – why they were grieving - how the religious and political leaders condemned Jesus and had him crucified - their loss of hope – verse 21 says “but we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. And added to it all – as it is written – “yes, and besides all this --- there is more to the story – there is more fear, astonishment; confusion -

So self-absorbed in themselves and recent experiences that they did not recognize Jesus. For most of the story, Cleopas and the other person had no idea Jesus was with them and in relationship with them talking, walking, and staying with them.

What was it that allowed them to recognize Jesus? It was near the end of the day. They had come to a village where they planned to spend the night. At their urging, Jesus stayed with them. He was walking ahead “as if he were going on.” But at their urging he stayed with them. And then they were at the table together, having a meal – and Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them.

And then scripture says “Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.” And they knew that’s what made the difference. Verse Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

Something as simple as breaking bread, sharing a meal together opened their eyes. They once were blind but now could see. They could see Jesus, they had found Jesus, and they knew Jesus was present with them. Knowing this they could wholly see and they could feel hope and joy – they could wholly live.

So how does the story of these two people tell our story; or how is our story as people of God, as Christians, as human beings reflected in this story from the Gospel of Luke?

When I think about all the suffering in the world, the decimation of natural resources I cannot help but think we are blind; that we cannot, do not see life all around us and be in awe, loving, respecting Mother Earth and one another. I have shed tears thinking about the alarming growing refugee population. An NPR report from June 2014 UN: Number Of Displaced People Hits Mark Not Seen Since World War II and reports that the UN says there were 51.2 million displaced people at the end of 2013, 6 million more than the previous year.¹ It should not be missed that the lethal bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal building occurred 20 years ago today and that tomorrow is the Boston Marathon; an event changed forever in our minds and hearts because of a lethal bombing 2 years ago. The prevalence of addiction and suicide are clear indicators people are suffering. That anyone in this country is homeless is truly amazing and heartbreaking to me. The ease with which some can and do dehumanize fellow human beings so as to find it not only acceptable, but necessary to treat them as an enemy; to put them in prison where they will not, can not be seen or heard; or to extinguish life God created is unbelievable to me. And what about the earthquakes that are occurring in places where earthquakes were never a risk before fracking? Is that not Mother Earth shaking and trembling and crying out from the ground. It reminds me of the story of Cain and Abel. God asks Cain where his brother Abel is and Cain replies with a question “Am I my brother’s keeper?” God responds, “Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground.” The disconnect we have to the environment in terms of our impact on climate change, destruction of the rain forest, safe drinking water, ample water is frightening, damaging, life-threatening, and separating us from God.

We are too often blind to all that is sacred in our midst. And when we are not blind, we are too fearful, hopeless, and in pain ourselves that we are unable to respond. We are empty – we need nourishment.

And today’s text offers a source of that nourishment. It is in the breaking of bread. It is in community. It is in relationship. When we take the time to sit together at a table, share a meal, our vision is restored. As a community of Christian faith that shares communion once a month, breaks bread together at least one a month – we have been given a gift. A gift of relationship. Our gathering to worship and to commune together offers such opportunity to build relationship beyond the Table of communion into the dining room, the chapel, in all the gathering spaces in this building, and in our homes, in the community, with Jesus at the center. Each and every meeting, event, conversation offers opportunity for relationship, for building community, and for recognizing Jesus in our midst.

¹ <http://digital.vpr.net/post/number-displaced-people-hits-high-last-seen-world-war-ii> from Copyright 2014 NPR. To see more, visit <http://www.npr.org/>.

As I shared at the beginning, I find this to be a really beautiful resurrection story. The beauty, I have discovered, is that is not only a resurrection story of Jesus, it is a resurrection story of the common people with whom he walks and talks. It is a story that offers hope of resurrection in our own lives, in our own time on this great earth, and with one another as we strive for right relationship, loving relationship with one another. When we recognize Jesus in our midst, when we relate to God in our relating with all that God creates, life is made new. We are whole. All of life is whole.

I share with you a poem by James Dilbert Freeman – entitled “I Am There”:

I Am There by James Dilbert Freeman

Do you need Me ? I am there.

You cannot see Me, yet I am the light you see by.

You cannot hear Me, yet I speak through your voice.

You cannot feel Me, yet I am the power at work in your hands.

I am at work, though you do not understand My ways.

I am at work, though you do not understand My works.

I am not strange visions. I am not mysteries.

Only in absolute stillness, beyond self, can you know Me
as I AM, and then but as a feeling and a faith.

Yet I am here. Yet I hear. Yet I answer.

When you need ME, I am there.

Even if you deny Me, I am there.

Even when you feel most alone, I am there.

Even in your fears, I am there.

Even in your pain, I am there.

I am there when you pray and when you do not pray.

I am in you, and you are in Me.

Only in your mind can you feel separate from Me, for
only in your mind are the mists of "yours" and "mine".

Yet only with your mind can you know Me and experience Me.

Empty your heart of empty fears.

When you get yourself out of the way, I am there.

You can of yourself do nothing, but I can do all.

And I AM in all.

Though you may not see the good, good is there, for
I am there. I am there because I have to be, because I AM.

Only in Me does the world have meaning; only out of Me does the world take form; only
because of ME does the world go forward.

I am the law on which the movement of the stars and the growth of living cells are founded.

I am the love that is the law's fulfilling. I am assurance.

I am peace. I am oneness. I am the law that you can live by.

I am the love that you can cling to. I am your assurance.
I am your peace. I am ONE with you. I am.

Though you fail to find ME, I do not fail you.
Though your faith in Me is unsure, My faith in you never
wavers, because I know you, because I love you.

Beloved, I AM there.