

BE KNOWN TO US . . .

(05/08/2022)

Scripture Lesson: Luke 24:13-35

“When he was at 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.” (Luke 24:30-31)

“And now here is my secret, a very simple secret. It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”

(Antoine de Saint-Exupery in *The Little Prince*)

This season, the Easter season, the seven weeks between Easter and Pentecost, is an especially meaningful segment of the liturgical year. In our worship during these weeks, we traditionally reflect on the ways that the disciples experienced the presence of their risen Lord and how this experience transformed them from disciples into apostles. The season, which includes the celebration of Jesus’ ascension into heaven and culminates with the disciples’ experience at Pentecost, is an affirmation that the story of salvation, the story of resurrection and new life does not end with the events of Easter Sunday.

In his last week with his disciples in human form, Jesus tells them he is going to die. The disciples are understandably confused and dismayed. Then Jesus tells them that this will not be the end of the story. Just as a grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die to bear fruit, he also needs to die to bear fruit. He tells them he will rise from the dead and then he will be present to them and to the world in a new way. It is doubtful whether the disciples understand this teaching, or that after the devastating experience of their Lord’s crucifixion, they even remember what he said.

Jesus’ body is placed in a tomb that is provided by Joseph of Arimathea shortly before sundown on Friday, the day he was crucified. Because the Jewish Sabbath begins at sundown, no work, including the burial of the dead, can take place on Saturday. Sometime between Friday night and Sunday morning Jesus rises from the dead because when the women arrive at the tomb shortly before dawn on Sunday, they discover that it is empty.

It seems to me that the central message of our faith is not the atonement, the belief that Jesus was crucified for us, though we believe that to be true. The central message of our faith is not that the tomb was empty, though we also believe that to be true. The central message of our faith is not even the affirmation that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, though we believe that to be true as well.

The central message of the Gospel is the proclamation that *Jesus lives*, that he lives in the world, and that he lives in us! The most important part of the story is, therefore, not even Easter Sunday; it is what happens *after* Easter Sunday. It is how, in their post-resurrection encounters with their risen Lord, Mary and the other disciples rediscover him--in the world and in their lives.

This morning I would like to push this train of thought one step further. I think the central message of the Gospel is not the *belief* that Jesus lives in the world and in us. It is the *discovery* that Jesus lives in the world and in us. When we discover or rediscover Jesus in our lives, just as Mary and the disciples did, resurrection is no longer a matter of religious belief; it is a matter of personal experience. When this happens, we will no longer believe; we will *know*!

As we heard in our scripture lesson this morning from the Gospel of Luke, later that day two of Jesus' disciples are walking on the road to Emmaus. They are probably heading back home. Little more than a rumor spread by a woman had whispered its way out of the night of their despair. Though they are traveling in daylight, the two disciples are dwelling in darkness.

The account of Jesus and the two disciples as recorded in Luke differs from what we read in Mark. Mark's description of the encounter is terse. In Mark we read:

After this [after appearing to Mary Magdalene] he [Jesus] appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. (Mark 16:12-13)

Mark devotes two verses to the encounter; Luke takes twenty-three. Mark records no dialogue, while Luke relates a good deal of dialogue. In Mark, the two men are members of the inner core of twelve disciples. In Luke, it is apparent that the two men, Cleopas and an unnamed follower, are not of the original twelve. Luke tells us that the two men, after their encounter with Jesus, return to where the "eleven were gathered together." This indicates that they could not have been two of the original twelve disciples, now eleven after Judas' death.

As the two disciples journey homeward, confused, dejected, Jesus suddenly appears and walks along with them. The disciples see him and talk to him, but they do not recognize him.

The disciples tell their mysterious traveling companion what has happened. They tell him about the crucifixion. They mention how the women told them that their Lord

has risen from the dead. Jesus listens patiently to their account. Finally, he can restrain himself no longer. He says, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe.”

Jesus implies that it is not because of a problem with their eyes and ears that they do not recognize him; it is because of a problem *with their heart*. He does not accuse them of being deaf and blind, but of being “slow of heart.” That is a profound observation or accusation! Perhaps, like the disciples, we should think about what it means to be “slow of heart,” the impact that this has on our faith as well as our relationships.

As Antoine de Saint-Exupery said in *The Little Prince*, “And now here is my secret, a very simple secret. It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”

Why were the disciples unable to recognize Jesus? One option is that Jesus may have appeared in a somewhat different human form. He may not have looked like himself. This would explain why Mary does not recognize him at the tomb and why the two disciples do not recognize their traveling companion. However, I am unable to understand why Jesus would disguise himself or why he would reappear in a different form.

There is another explanation. It is possible that Mary and the two disciples don't see Jesus because they aren't looking for him. Because they aren't looking for him as a living presence in the world and in their lives, they see but they do not know what it is that they see. Their lack of faith prevents them from seeing what is right before their eyes. They are seeing with their eyes, not with their heart.

These two disciples witnessed their Lord's crucifixion. They were there when his body was laid in the tomb. They experienced a tremendous loss. However, contrary to what they believe, Jesus is not dead! He is not separate from them. He is with them that very moment. In fact, he is with them even more fully now that he is no longer in human form. He is with them wherever they go. He is walking with them even when they believe they are walking alone.

When the two disciples are in the presence of the risen Christ, he opens the scriptures to them. He explains to them what it means. In his presence, the words of scripture come alive to them. They understand it, perhaps for the first time. They say to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” This can also happen to us. With the inspiration of the

Holy Spirit, we can discover or rediscover Jesus in scripture. Without this presence, this inspiration, this fire within us, the words of scripture are dead.

Note that the disciples were not looking for Jesus. This may explain why they didn't recognize him even when he was standing next to them. If we, like the disciples, are not looking for Jesus, it might explain why we never experience his presence. It might explain why we feel that we are walking the difficult and painful road of life alone, when Jesus is walking with us.

However, even though the disciples weren't looking for Jesus, Jesus was looking for them! Even though they weren't reaching out to Jesus, Jesus was reaching out to them. Like the disciples, even when we are not looking for Jesus, Jesus is looking for us; even when we are not reaching out to Jesus in worship and prayer, Jesus is reaching out to us.

When they sit at table with Jesus, when they break bread with him, the disciples' eyes are opened. They suddenly realize that they are in the presence of their Lord. They first see with their eyes, then they see with their heart, then they see with their eyes. When we see with our heart, we, like the disciples will be able to experience Jesus' presence in the most common daily activities.

The two disciples discover that they cannot hold onto Jesus. Just as they could not hold him in his human form, so, also, they cannot hold him in his spirit form. They recognize him in the breaking of the bread and immediately he "vanishes out of their sight." They have the encounter, but it does not last forever. They experience their risen Lord, but they cannot contain him.

Like the Spirit that moves where it will, this experience of our Lord comes and goes. We do not always feel his presence. Only the saints and mystics are constantly aware of his presence. But that's ok. We don't need to be greedy. An occasional encounter with Jesus is more than enough!

This brief encounter is all the two men need to renew their faith. They were initially heading home, back to their old lives. Now their hearts are aflame! That very night they return the seven miles to Jerusalem where they find the eleven gathered. They tell them what happened to them on the road to Emmaus, at the table, and how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. This time the others believe!

How can we experience our risen Lord? We can experience him in worship and in the sacraments. We can experience him in music that touches our soul. We can experience him in prayer. We can experience him in the love that we feel, the love we express, the love we receive. If we open our heart, we may experience our risen Lord in some barely discernible stirring within us. We may hear him speak to us, comfort us, and set our feet on the path he would have us walk.

If we see through the eyes of faith, we will see how Jesus is trying to create a world of peace and justice, a community of caring and compassion. If we see with our heart, we will see the face of Jesus in our brothers and sisters. We will see Jesus in those who are hungry and thirsty, in those whose lives are torn apart by war, in those members of minority groups who are objects of prejudice, discrimination, harassment, bullying, and violence. We will see Jesus in the immigrant and the refugee, in those who are outcasts from our society. Perhaps most importantly, we will also see Jesus within ourselves. When we see with our heart, when we discover or rediscover the Holy Spirit within us, we will realize that God loves us just as we are, and that God calls us to share this love with others.

As post-resurrection Christians, we pray that Jesus will open not only our eyes but also our hearts, that we will not only see but perceive, that we will recognize our risen Lord in our daily lives. We pray that, like the disciples, we will see the glimpses of truth that are revealed to us, that the slowness of our hearts might be quickened, and that we might be set free from everything that holds us back from fullness of life. As we rediscover Jesus, we will rediscover ourselves and other people in new and powerful ways.

On communion Sundays, we often sing (and thereby pray) the words of a hymn written by James Montgomery in 1825: “Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread.”

*Be known to us in breaking bread,
But then do not depart;
Saviour, abide with us, and spread
Thy table in our heart.*

This hymn could be a prayer of the two disciples following their experience of the risen Lord in Emmaus. Though it is a communion hymn, it speaks to more than our experience of presence in the sacrament. It reminds us that our Lord is with us, is made known to us whenever and wherever we break bread together, whenever two or three of us are gathered in his name. This is the dimension of fellowship that is at the heart of what it means to be the Christian church.

We pray that Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, will be made known to us not only in prayer and worship, but in every moment of our daily life. This can happen if we allow him to heal “the slowness of our heart.” When this happens, our Lord will not only be made known to us; he will be made known to the world through us.

When this happens, we, like the disciples, will finally grasp the true meaning of Easter!

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