

Luke 24:13-35

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.

Sermon 5/8/2011 By Susi Kawolics

When my husband and I were first married, like many young couples, we were trying to figure out how to negotiate the holidays. The basic difficulties came with trying to keep both families happy, to honor our family of origin traditions, to create our own, and to not drive ourselves crazy in doing all that. Some of our early Easters together involved eating brunch, lunch and dinner on the same day, as well as going to two churches and visiting three households. This had us going at a pretty frantic pace to many destinations.

Fortunately, over the years, our routine has now evolved into going to one church, and then having one meal together with our immediate and extended family. It has greatly cut down on the stress, as well as the amount of travel for us. But, in reflecting on the lectionary readings for the past few Sundays, I was thinking that Jesus may have had an inkling of what we felt like

in those earlier days. He too was awfully busy going from place to place on that first Easter Sunday.

On Easter Sunday morning, we heard the resurrection story from Matthew, which tells of the two women finding the empty tomb. As they were heading to Galilee to tell the disciples about this, Jesus appeared to them on the road. Last week's gospel passage was about how, that same Sunday evening, Jesus appeared to the disciples gathered in a locked room in Jerusalem. And today's gospel tells us that he also met Cleopas and his companion on the Road to Emmaus on that very same day, where he talked with them, and then broke bread with them. Galilee, Jerusalem, Emmaus – Jesus sure did his fair share of traveling on that first Easter Sunday.

This story of his appearance on the Road to Emmaus is found only in the gospel of Luke. Cleopas and his fellow traveler were evidently followers of Jesus. They had probably journeyed with him, known him, believed in him, and had expectations, hopes and dreams for what his role as Messiah would be. All of that had died just three days prior, when they witnessed Jesus' crucifixion. Although we're not told specifically the reason for their walk to Emmaus on that Sunday afternoon, it is probably that they just wanted to get away, to leave the disappointment, despair, and desolation behind them.

The name Emmaus itself means "warm spring." That sounds like an inviting place to get away from things, doesn't it? Some of us could have used a place of "Warm Spring" on Easter just to deal with the miserable weather we'd been having. But adding loss and discouragement on top of that, Emmaus truly becomes a desirable destination.

My guess is that we all have our Emmaus places – those places we go when our world falls apart. Perhaps it is the home of a loved one – a parent, a sibling, a child, a close friend or relative. Or maybe it's staying home and calling someone who's near and dear to us. Or possibly it's a special place outside, in nature, that is particularly comforting. For some it may be a gym, a bar, or maybe a support group. And there are those who would consider the church itself, or a group within the church, as their Emmaus. When we are hit with the cold dread of bad news, we need a warm place to go to in order to get our bearings, and find the hope and courage to go on. So Emmaus, warm spring, is what Cleopas and his fellow traveler were looking for. Their world had chilled, their outlook was desolate, their hopes had been dashed.

Looking at their situation from our perspective, we might think they should not have felt so hopeless, that they should have known the truth about Jesus' resurrection. After all, the women who had gone to the tomb had told them what the angel had said, and, as followers of Jesus, they had heard him say he would rise from the dead. But at that moment, in that time, they just weren't making those connections. Apparently, they were having a hard time making any connections that day. They didn't even recognize Jesus when he came and walked with them! When we are in a place of grief and sadness like they were, it is hard for us to make connections as well.

Jesus, however, wanted to make a connection with them. He wanted everyone to know that he had risen, that God had conquered death, and that he was still with them. In truth, had Jesus just appeared to important people on that Sunday, he probably could have gotten this message out more efficiently. But he appeared first to the women, who were the marginalized, and therefore not taken seriously in society at that time. Then, before appearing to the disciples, Jesus showed up to these wanderers on the Road to Emmaus. That is part of the beauty of this story. Jesus appears in a place and to people who are unknown. They are on their way to Emmaus. Scholars have never even been able to locate this village with any certainty. And the two travelers are virtually unknown. Cleopas is never mentioned before this story, and then never

again. And his companion is not even named. We are merely told, “One of them, whose name was Cleopas ... “ This has caused scholars to speculate that perhaps his companion in the story was actually a woman, maybe even his wife, because couples often traveled together at that time, and given the cultural norms, it would not be unusual for her name to be omitted. In any case, these two were just plain ordinary folk, like you and me.

It is significant that Jesus appears to ordinary people, who were not named as his disciples. The book of Luke, written about 60 AD, was aimed at those who did not know the earthly Jesus personally, nor did they know people who knew this Jesus personally. And Luke’s audience also did not live in Jerusalem. So this story was to let them know, and us as well, that just because we can’t experience Jesus as the early apostles did, we can still have encounters with him. We do not have to travel to where Jesus lived for this to happen. In our own place, in our own time, in our own life journeys, Jesus comes to meet us.

When Jesus met the two Emmaus travelers, he listened to their stories, he interpreted scripture for them, and then broke bread with them. This is how they knew him. Although it was in the breaking of the bread that they eventually recognized him, he had already prepared their hearts when he shared the word with them. Looking back, they were able to say, “Were our hearts not burning within us while he was interpreting scripture?”

Our church worship service provides an opportunity to encounter Jesus in a similar way. He has promised that whenever two or three gather in his name, he is here. Here, in this place, the word is broken open, and bread is shared. This is a place where we gather, tell our stories, and celebrate the sacraments. When we celebrate the sacrament Communion, we break bread together. But the gathering of the community is also a sacrament for us. When we care for each other, pray for each other, listen and comfort each other, we are making known the presence of Jesus. When we imitate his characteristic way of giving, feeding, forgiving, and offering compassion, we make it possible for others to recognize that Jesus is among us.

On this day when we honor mothers, I share this quote written by Peter Woods of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. He says that *Each encounter with nurturing selfless, bread sharing warmth from another human being, first modelled by our Mothers, can be for the honest pilgrim a moment of resurrection encounter. It may happen anywhere at any time.*

So while these encounters happen in the church, they also happen outside of church, in our homes, schools, work places, neighborhoods. Whenever we aid those who suffer, listen to people’s stories, provide comfort in painful times, when we offer hospitality and share our resources, we are providing the opportunity for others to encounter Jesus. In our giving of these Church World Services blankets, we pray that those who receive them may know the comforting assurance of Jesus’ love. May they recognize the risen Christ who abides with us, and with them, and comes to meet us all wherever we are on life’s journey.

After those two Emmaus travelers had their encounter with Jesus, they rushed back to Jerusalem. Although they went back to the same place they had started out, they were changed to the core. They had had an encounter that transformed their world from dismal to hopeful, from darkness to light. They moved from walking slowly and sadly on the way to Emmaus to hurrying back gladly to share their good news with the others. Their burdened hearts which had been cold and heavy laden were made warm and light.

This beautiful story reminds us that, yes, Jesus is encountered when we come to church and break open the word and share the sacraments. But he also comes to meet us when we travel to Emmaus, when we are walking in our despair, confusion, pain and hopelessness. And he is made known to us in the smallest gestures of comfort, love and kindness. He comes to connect

with us, to assure us of his presence. May we recognize the many ways we encounter the risen Christ, and be able to return home with hearts burning – with the assurance and trust of his abiding presence now and always. And may we, through our gestures of kindness and care, offer that same assurance to others. Amen.