

Their Eyes were Opened
EASTER April 4, 2010
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Scripture: Luke 24:13-49

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then 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?" ¹⁹He 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, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But 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. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and 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. ²⁴Some 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." ²⁵Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But 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. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he

vanished from their sight. ³²They 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?” ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Proclamation of The Word

They had walked miles with this stranger along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and they did not recognize that it was Jesus. They even invited him to stay with them for the night. And then...

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; (Luke 24:30-31)

How would they have known that they had met Jesus?

He wasn't preaching a sermon, healing, or giving a theology lesson. It wasn't his face or his voice. It wasn't even his eyes. It was his hands and the simple act of taking bread, blessing and breaking it. That is when their eyes are opened and they recognize him.

How do you know when you have met Jesus?

For some the simple surprises of beauty from a ramble in the woods, recognition in a friend's eyes, or a meal shared remind us of the presence of God.

I suspect that at times, Jesus has been the true companion who has walked beside you through the valley, so to speak.

Other times, he is the sure, strong voice of wisdom guiding and directing you.

And still other times, Jesus is the nagging pull that says, "There is more to life than work, study, self-indulgence." Jesus calls us to a life of significance.

For a few minutes, put yourselves in Cleopas and his friend's shoes, and walk awhile in them on that first Easter. These shaken, disappointed disciples had welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday. He had physically been present just a couple of days ago. He was cruelly killed by the authorities for trumped up charges. It would be as if you had had lunch with a friend a few days before, only to hear news of his untimely death. It seems unreal and shock sets in.

Jesus had given these followers hope that God's intentions were different than their reality. They were stirred by his life and news had spread among the regular people that things were about to change.

And on this first Easter Sunday later in the day, Cleopas and his companion appear shaken, perplexed. They had expected something different, not a crucified Jesus laid to rest in a borrowed tomb. Luke reports that they were sad. Of course they were. But more than being sad, they were grieving. They had lost Jesus and all that meant for their lives.

I suspect they were grieving on many different levels.

For one their hopes for a better life and situation had been dashed. Jesus was the Messiah come to liberate the Jewish people. Jesus' death meant defeat.

At the same time, they were missing their leader, the one who had brought life into a depressing reality, and light into dark times. And now, this news of a missing body. These disciples did not know what resurrection meant. They were certainly perplexed.

Grief is like that, you know. It is experienced on so many levels. Not only do we grieve persons, but the hopes and dreams they represent. Life will not be as we had expected.

And on this Sunday we want to believe in the resurrection- for it represents to us that death is never the end.

Even if our eyes are blurred by dashed hopes, we trust that something new might be born.

Even when our eyes are blurred by what we wanted to see, we hope to catch a new vision for what might be.

We want to believe in resurrection- especially for those we hold dear and even for ourselves. We want to know that life does not stop but continues in some meaningful way in the presence of the Living God.

We want to walk by faith and not by sight.

But Jesus knows us well just as he knew Cleopas and friend as they walked along the road. They walked a long ways together. Jesus knew he could not just tell about resurrection and new life, they had to see it. It is pretty unbelievable to the rational mind. So he did what he always did. He showed them resurrection.

We will all have to walk the road to Emmaus some time or another. Sometimes our hopes and dreams dashed along with the loss of a beloved person. We will all be disillusioned by death at some time or another.

Death might visit us in the form of a diagnoses or news of danger.

Death can visit us as we witness tragedy, harm, and disaster of near or distant neighbors.

But what Jesus does is walk with them in their disillusionment.

He does not beat them over the head for not getting it.

He does not patronize them with "It will all be fine."

He simply walks with them, listens, and he prods them with questions so they might understand; but most of all, he is their companion, just as he is our companion.

We never walk that Emmaus road alone.

He knows that faith cannot always be explained, but must be experienced...So he does what he will do before us today...Take bread, bless it, break it, and give himself away.

Bread does no one any good if it is not broken.

It cannot fulfill its purpose of providing sustenance, giving life.

It is only when it is broken and shared that it matters.

And that is when Jesus shows up.

Oh, he is already present, but it is at that point that he is made real so we might recognize him.

Resurrection has to be experienced.

As people with eyes wide open, we believe that we can walk with Jesus.

And if we are not sure how to do that, we know that we do not

have to walk alone, but can walk with those who already know him.

And this simple act of worship is repeated every time we share bread asking God to bless it- every time we share Jesus, his love, his mercy, his truth with another.

The Lord's Supper must be practiced so that when you take and received the body and blood of Christ, he is resurrected in you.

We must practice our faith in order to live into it.

In the same way, we must practice resurrection as God's Easter people.

Wendell Berry, farmer, theologian, poet, reminds us in his poem *Practice Resurrection*...to live a redeemed life...to be free of the chains of death.

So, friends, every day do something

that won't compute. Love the Lord.

Love the world. Work for nothing.

Take all that you have and be poor.

Love someone who does not deserve it...

Ask the questions that have no answers... Plant sequoias...

Listen to carrion - put your ear close, and hear the faint chattering of the songs that are to come.

Expect the end of the world. Laugh. Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful though you have considered all the facts...

Be joyful though you have considered all the facts....practice resurrection...¹

Are you ready to walk that resurrection road with Jesus?

Practice resurrection, and you will meet and see the Risen Lord. That is Good News!

¹ Wendell, Berry, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" from *The Country of Marriage*, (Harcourt Brace, 1973)

Words at the Table

Jesus, our host, invites all who trust in him to take part in this simple meal.

Come whether you have been here often or whether you have not been here in a long time.

Come and be present to Jesus as he is present to us

Come not just as you are, but also for who you long to be with God's help

Come experience the transformation of ordinary gifts used by God for extraordinary purposes.

Prayer

O Lord, we believe the words of Holy Scripture which claims, "Death has been swallowed up in victory.'

⁵⁵‘Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?’

⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” By the power of the resurrection we give you our thanks and praise! Amen

(1 Corinthians 15:54-57)