

Sermon for Easter 3A
Sunday, April 23, 2023
“Jesus joins us on our pathways of life”

Text: Luke 24:13-35

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Frequently whenever I'm out and about I run into somebody I know. In this big city of New York, I've run into friends, acquaintances, colleagues, even church members on a sidewalk in Manhattan, in a subway station, occasionally even in a bar or restaurant. Even internationally, I have run into people I knew in an airport, on a street corner in London or Paris, once on a train! It usually takes me a second to make the connection, or they recognize me at first and call out my name. But at that moment of recognition, I feel a burning inside, a compelling gut feeling of happiness to see them. Have you ever experienced your heart burning when you met someone unexpectedly in an unusual place?

That must have been something like what the two disciples felt on the road to Emmaus the day they met Jesus there. The lesson from the Gospel today is a post-Resurrection account from St. Luke's Gospel; it is one of several sightings of Jesus that occurred after his resurrection and before his ascension. This particular sighting occurred late in the day of the Resurrection. Jesus met two of his disciples, who were not among the twelve of his inner circle—one named Cleopas and another whose name we do not know—on a road leading to a town called Emmaus. St. Luke usually shares lots of details in his stories of Jesus, but his account of the Resurrection is less detailed than that of other gospel writers. For Luke, it's what happens *after* the Resurrection that is important. Beginning with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them telling the others that they had seen the Lord, St. Luke prepares us for learning about how the message of the resurrected Christ is to be told to the rest of the world, which he will do in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Luke prepares his readers first by telling us this little vignette about Jesus and two disciples on the road to Emmaus, a town about seven miles from Jerusalem.

The crucifixion left the followers of Jesus stunned and wondering what would happen next. The two characters in today's gospel story were going back home to Emmaus to resume their lives and pick up the pieces after the sad events of Jesus's crucifixion. Cleopas and his companion were feeling disillusioned, disappointed, jaded, betrayed, bereaved, and probably somewhat confused. “We had hoped that he was the one to set Israel free,” said Cleopas. The followers of Jesus had so much hope and trust in the man they had been following: listening to his teaching and preaching, witnessing his miracles, and expecting him to free Israel from foreign control. But, it seemed that their hopes were dashed. And although they had heard from some women of their group that Jesus was alive, they still did not believe them.

At first, they did not recognize Jesus. Perhaps this is a hint of what our own resurrection bodies will look like at the end of the ages, something that would be

unrecognizable to us right now. Cleopas and his companion were even annoyed that this “stranger” on the road seemed not know about the events that had taken place. Then, Jesus revealed himself to them, and they recognized him. Jesus met them on the road back to their daily lives to restore the hope that they thought they had lost; he gave them a reason to go on; and, he gave them a reason to tell the world the good news.

We have all had “Road to Emmaus” moments, I’m sure. A time we ran into someone we knew at an unexpected time and place. A time when we returned from an experience that moved us, perhaps the airline flight home after a fantastic vacation, or the subway ride home after a great concert or play, or perhaps while cleaning up after a holiday dinner with family and friends, or maybe even after a spiritually moving worship experience. These “Emmaus moments” are pleasant and easy for us to acknowledge the presence of God. But we’ve all had troubling “Road to Emmaus” moments when we’ve been faced with a personal tragedy, a natural disaster, an act of violence, an act of terrorism, or some other disappointment. It’s those times when we might have trouble seeing the presence of God in our midst. The two on the road to Emmaus might have been angry at God in the days following the Jesus’ crucifixion. It was a time of great sorrow for Cleopas and his traveling companion. They were at a point in their lives when they might have wondered if there was any hope left.

This story is especially powerful during troubling times. This story reminds us that God is always with us along the pathways of life. Even during the lowest points in our lives, in our periods of uncertainty, in times when we feel depressed, disappointed, anxious, scared, angry, and bereaved, Jesus meets us on the journey and fills us with hope. He had been through the worst that a human could experience and rose above it—and we can too. When Cleopas and his companion thought all hope was lost, Jesus gave them a way to know that God was with them and to recognize his power and love for us. Jesus revealed himself to them and their hope was reinvigorated.

When we have “road to Emmaus” moments, be they the happy ones or the sad ones, we must keep the confidence that God is present with us. If we look carefully, we can recognize it. If we look hard enough, we can see God at work. If we open ourselves up to God, even in the roughest moments of our lives, he will reveal his presence to us and give us hope to keep on keeping on.

The encounter with Jesus was a powerful moment: the travelers were together on the road, then the scriptures were opened up to them, then they shared a meal in which the risen Christ was revealed to them, then they shared the good news with others. That models what we should do as Christians: to remember all of the moments when God met us and we knew his presence, and share the experience. When our hearts burn within us, we can say, “I have seen the Lord!”

And in those times when we are unsure about what’s going on, we should invite the risen Christ to be with us, restore our hope, and keep us safe along the journey,

remembering the words from the Collect for the Presence of Christ that we pray at Evening Prayer, which hearkens back to that day on the road to Emmaus and revitalizes us in the Holy Eucharist:

Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know thee as thou art revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of thy love. Amen.