

*Third Sunday of Easter*

April 30, 2017

Sermon by Pastor Cindy Bullock

The Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke. (Luke 24: 13-35)

Now on that same day [when Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene,] two [disciples] 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."

The Gospel of our Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, I've got some good news this week. My mother received an offer for her house. Last fall, for health reasons, she decided to move from Williamsburg, Virginia, to Baltimore, Maryland, to live with my brother. And ever since then she had been trying to sell that house. It's looking like now early this summer I will be helping her pack. Pack up a household, a lifetime of memories - furniture, and clothing, and memories.

You know, like that big green ceramic bowl that always held mountains of popcorn for the family after she had stood by the stove and popped it. Or that ceramic ballerina that I painted for her when I was in fifth grade. and somehow it is still sitting on the shelf. Or the pictures. My mother loved pictures. They are everywhere in her house – on the walls, on the bookshelves, on the mantle. Senior pictures of all the grandkids, dressed up and looking clean. Vacations, with beautiful sunsets and crowds of laughing people. Great grandkids' first birthday parties, with cake smeared all over them. Dance recitals, scouting awards, baseball teams. All the joy that fills the years.

I wonder, I wonder what the followers of Jesus would have been packing up three days after his death. I wonder what pictures they would lovingly wrap in paper and put in that box. Maybe a snapshot of a little girl, smiling in her mother's arms. She had been dead, you know, and Jesus raised her up. Or maybe it's the picture of the ten lepers, all standing there with goofy smiles and clean, clear skin. Maybe it's a panoramic shot of a hillside, with a crowd listening to stories. And remember the one about Peter, after he tried walking on water, and he's all wet and dripping. Happy moments and memories. Making it through hard times together, laughing together, wishing there could be more.

But now it was over. Jesus was dead. The funeral is over, and everything is packed up. And it's time to head out if they're going to make it to Emmaus by dinnertime.

And now what? I wonder what they were talking about along that road. Did they tell each other funny stories? Funny stories that had to always include Peter, because he was always good for a laugh. Or, I wonder if they were asking, "What if?" "What if we hadn't gone back to Jerusalem?" "What if we'd been able to stop Jesus from tearing up the temple that day?" "What if we hadn't run away – if we stood up and fought?" There's always "What if?" Or maybe that's not what they talked about. Maybe they just talked about the weather, because sometimes you just need to get away from the grief.

But then someone was there beside them. "Hello, stranger. Sure, come walk with us. What were we talking about? Oh, you know, a friend of ours ran afoul of Rome and was crucified. You probably heard about him, Jesus of Nazareth. He could have done such great things. We had hopes that he would redeem Israel." "No? You haven't heard of him? Well, let us tell you."

And on they went, going over the stories, remembering the scenes, the photographs, who was in it, what they did, how it turned out.

Luke tells us the stranger was Jesus, but they didn't know that. Why didn't they know that? The women had already told them that the tomb was empty. And others of the disciples had gone to verify it. Surely they knew Jesus was alive and abroad in the world. But perhaps they were only remembering the pictures. What had already happened. Jesus, how he looked then. Forgetting that resurrection might change things.

Sometimes I think we look at Jesus that way, too - the way we've seen him in the pictures, the way we imagine him: in a white robe, with a bit of a beard, some sandals, looking every bit the First Century Mediterranean man he used to be. I suspect sometimes we look for him doing the things he did then: feeding a crowd with fish and bread, taking on Pharisees, with us secretly cheering behind him. We think of Jesus frozen in time, like a picture of a long-dead relative in period costume, smiling at the camera.

But it's Easter! "*Christ is risen!*" Can I have a "*He is risen indeed!*"?

RESPONSE: "*He is risen indeed!*"

And you can add an "*Alleluia!*" too.

If Christ is risen from the dead, if Christ is living and moving among us, he's not going to look like the pictures. It's kind of like when you see your nephew, and you remember him as this smiling little cherub with chubby cheeks and dimples in diapers, and instead you encounter a grown man with a law degree and kids of his own

Jesus is the Risen Christ – part of a whole new reality. The human one, living in the fullness of God's reign; in the fullness of life; in the fullness of God's love and dreams for this creation. And how can we even imagine what that might look like? As with the disciples at Emmaus, he could be standing right next to us, walking alongside of us. And if we're not looking for something new, we might not know that he is there.

So how do we see this Risen One? How do we find him? We all say, "Jesus is with me," and he is. But that's not all. That's not enough. The Risen Christ is active and moving. Christ is working in the world, and working in us. Christ is healing, and teaching, and challenging, and calling us in these days. Christ is ushering in a whole new reality, where people are loved and cared for. Where people have dignity and respect. Where healing can happen and fear has no place. Christ is here among us. He is bringing abundance and peace in the Kingdom of God, whether we see him or not.

So how do we look for him? How do we hear him? How do we follow the Risen Christ, when we don't know when or where he might appear?

Think about the disciples on the road that day. They weren't looking for Jesus. They were leaving him behind. And he surprised them. They only knew it was him later. "*Were not our hearts burning when he spoke to us on the road?*"

We don't create encounters with the Risen Christ. Christ comes to us. We will always be surprised by him. We'll think, "Did that just happen?" "Was that Christ speaking to me?" We will be surprised in everyday, ordinary encounters that invite us to think in new ways. "Oh, now I see." "I could do that." "That would change things."

The living Christ comes and surprises us, and invites us into something new. Are we open to newness, new ideas, new interpretations, new ways of being in the world, new ways of interacting with people? Are we open to that person, maybe that person right next to us, being the Risen Christ?

Two disciples met Jesus on the road. He spoke with them, he ate with them. And when they realized who it was, he was gone. You can't hold on to this Risen Christ. You can't hold him down and take his picture and put it on the mantle, because next time you see him he won't look like that anymore. Jesus moved on.

So what did the disciples do? They went back to the community to say, "*I have seen the Lord.*" It is both witness and confirmation to speak those words. "*I have seen.*" "I have seen something new. Have you seen it, too?" "I have heard something. Have you heard it?" "I've come to this in my thinking. Could you think that, too?"

Christians can't be Christians alone. This is why the baptized have sponsors. It's why this morning later, when Signe is baptized, the congregation gathered will promise to walk with her, and she with them.

We come together, so we can share our encounters with the living, breathing Risen Christ, who always surprises us, and always leads us into something new. Opening our eyes, and leading us to new life and new hope.

Two disciples met Jesus on the road. He spoke with them, ate with them. And they went out with the news. "*I have seen!*" We have seen, too.

Amen.