

This is the 3rd Sunday of Easter. We're still celebrating the Resurrection. We just had the last Gospel lesson for this year which narrates the events of the first Easter Sunday.

We've been looking at John this Lent as part of our Parish Reading Project. The past 2 Sundays we've read John's account of the events of Easter Sunday.

But today, we get a small blast of Luke. This will be our only Gospel from Luke for the rest of 2020—we won't hear from Luke again until Christmas Eve.

And it's a wonderful Gospel lesson today: The Road to Emmaus.

Luke places our focus on two of Jesus followers, one of whom is named Cleopas. The identity of the other disciple is unknown. It could have been a man, like we have pictured on our stained-glass window at St. Paul's. That's the traditional way it's depicted in art. But these days, most scholars think it's probable that the other disciple was a member of Cleopas' household: a son, a daughter, a wife. In fact, for various reasons, many scholars think that there's a good chance that we're dealing with a married couple here: Cleopas, and his wife, who was probably named Mary. In fact, if you remember back to the 19th chapter of John, one of the women standing at the foot of the cross was Mary the wife of Clopas.¹ Clopas and Cleopas are probably the same person. So we quite possibly have Cleopas and his wife Mary heading home after exhausting events in Jerusalem.

It must have been a depressing Sunday for these two disciples. Luke tells us that these two are heading home to the village of Emmaus. Jesus was executed on Friday. Saturday was the Sabbath, so they couldn't travel then. Sunday is their first opportunity to go home. So they begin to walk the 7 miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

Remember what it would have been like from their standpoint. These two had had a rough time.

They would have experienced all of the ups and downs of Holy Week: excitement at Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday; worry when events turned against him, when Jesus was arrested, when he was put on trial; and utter dejection when he was crucified. They had thought that Jesus was the one. They had thought that he was the Messiah. But now Jesus was dead. A week earlier these disciples would have been full of hope. But Holy Week ended for them in a dead end of despair. So on Sunday, they leave Jerusalem behind. They leave the pain and anguish of the cross behind, and they head for home.

And somewhere along the way, Jesus, the risen Jesus, starts walking with them. But as so often happens in these Gospel accounts of the resurrection, the two disciples don't immediately recognize him.

Jesus is walking alongside them, and he asks what they're discussing. And when he does that, Luke says that these 2 disciples "stood still, looking sad." In other words, Jesus'

¹ John 19:25

question stops them dead in their tracks. That tells us that the reports they might have heard about the empty tomb on Easter morning really didn't mean much to them. They were still sad. They were still paralyzed by their grief.

Then, Cleopas is able to muster a response. But he acts as if Jesus has just fallen off of the turnip truck, or as if he's just stepped out of a flying saucer. He says, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" "Where have you been dude? How could you possibly not know what's going on?"

And then they tell Jesus all about Jesus. They tell how Jesus was arrested and put to death. And the clincher is this statement: "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." In other words, 'We had hoped he was the Messiah.'

Remember, the expectation was that the Messiah was going to be a conqueror, that the Messiah would come as a warrior and king. The fact that Jesus was executed as a common criminal, the fact that Jesus suffered and died, meant to them that there was no way that he could have been the Messiah. In their interpretation of the Old Testament, what happened to Jesus meant beyond any shadow of a doubt that he was NOT the one they'd been waiting for.

And so, the two disciples are sad as they are making their trip to Emmaus. They truly believe that their hopes, their dreams, their future lay dead at the foot of the cross.

Now, the irony is absolutely delicious. These disciples think that Jesus is the only one who doesn't know what's going on. But in fact, Jesus is the only one who REALLY DOES know what's going on. He's the only one who truly understands what it really means to be God's chosen, God's Messiah.

So Jesus, walking along basically tells them, 'No, no, you've got it all wrong.' "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!" And then he asks them, "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?"

And then, Luke says that Jesus explains scripture to them. Jesus speaks of all the scriptures concerning himself, beginning with Moses, and moving to all of the prophets.

We don't know exactly what Jesus said. But from the context, we can make a good guess. Jesus apparently shows them that the OT points in many places to God's Servant who would suffer, to a Messiah who would give his back to be beaten, a Victim who would be rejected and put to death. Contrary to their expectations, Jesus shows them in their scriptures that the Messiah would come not as a conquering king but as a suffering servant.

In other words, Jesus apparently tells them that the events of Holy Week were not unexpected. Instead they were very much the way they were supposed to be. These things occurred just as they had been intended from the very beginning.

And thus, after walking and talking with Jesus, and listening to him, they reach Emmaus as night is falling. Jesus acts like he is going to go along the road. But the disciples ask Jesus to stop and stay with them.

And Luke tells us that Jesus does. While reclining at the table with them, Jesus takes bread, he blesses it, he breaks it, and he gives it to them.

Does that sound familiar? Take bread; bless; break; give? Sounds just like another Supper a few nights earlier. Take, bless, break, and give. Those are verbs from the Last Supper on the night before Jesus died. Those are also verbs from every celebration of the Eucharist.

So Jesus breaks the bread at Emmaus. And it is at that moment, in the breaking of the bread, that the two disciples realize who it is that is sitting with them. They realize that it is Jesus himself. And then Luke tells us Jesus disappears from their sight.

And then, they start talking about their experience of Jesus that day: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" They're so excited that they can't stay in Emmaus. They are so excited that they head on back to Jerusalem. And they go and tell the other disciples the good news that Jesus truly is alive. And they tell how they traveled with him through the Scriptures, and how they recognized him in the Breaking of the Bread.

Now, if you think about it, in a very real way the pattern of Emmaus is the pattern for our Christian lives. It's the pattern of our Christian worship, week after week. We are invited to meet Jesus in Scripture. Then we are invited to meet him in the Breaking of the Bread.

We gather together to encounter God's word. We hear it read in the lessons. We meditate on it together and grapple with it during the sermon. We're not supposed to come to scripture and try to conform it to our preconceived notions. Instead, we are called to wrestle, to dig, to grapple with scripture in order that it can transform us.

And afterwards, we shift our focus to this altar, to this table.

We offer a prayer of blessing and thanksgiving. The New Testament word for Thanksgiving is *eucharisteo*, Eucharist. We do the same thing Jesus did. We take. We bless. We break. We give. We 21st century disciples still gather to meet our Lord in the same way as those first century disciples: in breaking open Scripture, and in the Breaking of the Bread.

Yes, we are currently in a strange season when we all can't physically partake of the bread. But we all still can give thanks. We can all still experience Jesus' presence in both Scripture and in the Breaking of the Bread. Even in a time of pandemic and social distancing,

we can all still engage in offering *eucharisteo*, Eucharist, thanksgiving to God for all God does for us.

Is Easter 2020 playing out the way we would have hoped it would? No way. Not being able to gather together in this room to worship together this Easter season has been a huge disappointment for all of us, me included.

But then again, the first Easter almost 2,000 years ago didn't play out like the disciples were hoping it would, either. And they too were disappointed. In fact their disappointment blinded them from perceiving the presence of Jesus in their midst. Jesus was present on his terms, not according to their expectations. But he was present, nonetheless.

He was present. And he opened scripture to them. And he gave thanks. And he broke the bread.

And we can continue to do that today. Even in strange circumstances, we can continue to do that today. We can hear scripture. We can offer *Eucharisteo*, Thanksgiving, Eucharist. We can break the bread. And we can experience the spiritual presence of our Risen Lord.

As we prayed in our Collect of the Day at the beginning of our service:

"O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work."

Or as another classic prayer says,

"Be present, be present, O Jesus, our great High Priest, as you were present with your disciples, and be known to us in the breaking of bread."²

² BCP p. 834