

LECTIONARY TEXT LINK:

https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Easter/AEaster3_RCL.html

**A SERMON FOR THE 3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER, APRIL 26, 2020
WE HAD HOPED**

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. Luke 24:13-35

One of the gifts for me in this time of isolation has been time for walks. Most days I walk two or three miles. It gives me some focused time of prayer, reflection, and observation. Another gift in this walking on a regular basis is that I have become less concerned with fitting the walk into a busy schedule and plowing through it. Instead, I am able to notice things along the way, I am being more attentive to details, seeing things that were always in plain sight but that I had missed in my hurry or my preoccupation with my long list of scheduled activities.

I imagine that is what those two disciples were doing as they walked along the road to Emmaus. They suddenly had time on their hands, their schedule had disappeared now that Jesus had been crucified. They recounted the events of the past week and talked about all that had happened. In their loss and grief they could only focus on what was not to be. We had hoped.

This is what we do after a tragic event, we keep telling the story of how it happened as we walk away from the event. It's difficult to walk away, to leave the hospital, to leave the scene of death, to leave the cemetery, to leave the argument of a dead relationship, to leave the addiction, or to leave behind ways of doing things that no longer work. For us in this pandemic it has been hard to let go of so many things, both good and not so good, and perhaps most of all, our assumptions. Just like those disciples we had hoped.

We had hoped that after a few weeks of waiting out the virus our lives would return to normal. We had hoped we would be back in church for Easter. We had hoped we would not lose our job, lose our investments, lose our social events. We had hoped to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, and weddings. We had hoped for our vacation plans. We may fear that this virus has put an end to our hopes.

Maybe you are not literally walking, but we have all had more time to be reflective. What stories are you sharing with those who are with you; what are you recalling with family and friends over the phone; what are you thinking to yourself about what is most important in your life?

Life is a journey; a pattern of mourning and rejoicing. Life happens along the twists and turns of the road and we make sense of it through our relationships and in our conversations. As people of faith we make sense of life with our worship, our liturgy, our life in community. We believe that Christ is with us always, part of our relationships and conversations even when we do not at first recognize him. Or perhaps, we practice a bit of denial that Jesus is with us, because to admit it would mean we would need to change, we would need to live our life differently.

This pandemic has forced us to live our lives differently, hasn't it? Our habits and preferences have been turned upside down. We are relearning that second grade social studies lesson about the difference between wants and needs. In all of our conversations with each other and with ourselves in our time of reflection, what are we finding to be essential? What are we learning about ourselves? What are we discovering about our relationship with God and our connection to the Church as the Body of Christ? On the road to Emmaus, Jesus is honest with the two travelers. I have to believe Jesus was gentle, but he spoke truth – they were being foolish and slow of heart to believe. Then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted the things about himself in all the scriptures. I think it's important to notice that Jesus did not do this until after he listened to them, until after they had processed their feelings and collected their thoughts. And he did not force himself upon them but waited to be invited to stay with them. How gentle and wise Jesus is with us. How brave of those two disciples to invite Jesus to stay with them.

This story is almost always used to help us understand that Jesus is known to us in the breaking of the bread, but as I contemplate it this week, it's clear that Jesus is also known in the scripture and in our conversations about the scripture. In this time when we cannot meet together for worship and holy communion, scripture is a way in which we can see Jesus and know him to be present among us. I encourage you to read some scripture each day and take a few minutes to be still and notice where Jesus might be in your own life right now.

We had hoped for so many things that have been upended because of the pandemic. But perhaps Jesus is more profoundly present to us in ways we would never have noticed before. Eucharist is a sacrament where Jesus is present; present and transforming us into a new way of life. There are sacramental images of transformation happening all around us even in these strange times. What are you seeing, what are you noticing? Maybe it's the sky that is a deeper blue, families spending more time together outside, more kindness, respect and attentiveness shared in those times we must venture out for needed supplies. This week I read an article that the Himalayas are now visible from the plains of India and Pakistan for the first time in thirty years because air pollution is decreasing as a result of our staying at home. I believe Jesus is present in these things, just as he is present with those who are suffering, and with those whose work ensures our safety and common life.

The travelers on the road to Emmaus had given up hope and were choosing to return to their old way of life. We are in a time of great change; it's a liminal time when we will make a choice about how we will move forward. Will we invite Jesus and all the newness of life that he brings to cross the threshold into our lives? We can now see that some of the old ways of life are not sustainable. Inadequate healthcare and a living wage affect all of us eventually. A virus has no respect for race or class. Another old way of life that will change is how we are the Church. Doing things in the same way we've always done them is not

going to work anymore. For so many reasons, now is the time for us to invite Jesus into our conversations on this unknown road into the future.

Jesus is not always the most comfortable of guests to invite into our lives, but he is patient. Jesus didn't reveal himself to Cleopas and his companion right away. He joined them in their journey and was present with them as they honestly shared their loss and grief. Lament takes time. And sometimes lament is the journey that leads us to the awareness that we not only need new life but that it is possible.

In our collect for today we pray that the eyes of our faith will be opened, that we may behold God in all his redeeming work. God is very present, especially in our deepest need, and the risen Christ waits to be invited to stay with us. Amen.