

Sermon for Easter 3 April 18 2021 by the Rev. Mary Bell-Plouffe

Road to Emmaus Luke 24:13-35

I must confess that when I took a close look at the gospel assigned for this morning, I was disappointed.

All through Easter, beginning with Maundy Thursday, we've been hearing the Gospel of John.

Today, we've switched to Luke's gospel.

I like Luke's gospel; Luke is a fabulous storyteller.

It's in Luke's gospel that we have some of the greatest of Jesus' parables-stories we call 'The Good Samaritan' 'The Good Shepherd' 'The Prodigal Son' .

All these are only in Luke.

My disappointment with the assigned Gospel for this morning, isn't because it's from Luke,

it's because it's very similar to the gospel we heard last week from John,

And I didn't see how I could preach a 2nd sermon

on Jesus appearing to the disciples and saying 'Peace be with you'.

But more than that, I really wanted us to hear and ponder

the story of Jesus meeting that couple on the Road to Emmaus.

So, I changed the gospel lesson for this morning.

'The Road to Emmaus'.

It's only in Luke that we have this story,

a story I think, dear to many of us.

It can be a metaphor for our whole Christian journey -- walking with Jesus.

Our passage this morning begins with 'Now on that same day'.

It's still the first Easter Sunday, but late in the day, almost evening.

Two of Jesus' followers are walking 7 miles from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus.

One is called Cleopas, the other is likely his wife Mary.

(John's gospel lists Mary, the wife of Clopas
as one of the women watching from a distance
when Jesus is crucified and dies.)

Cleopas and Mary are walking home, discouraged, sad, confused, probably afraid.

Jesus comes walking beside them; because this is what Jesus does.

He comes and walks with us where we are,
amid challenges and grief, amid darkness and despair,
when we are bent under the weight of heavy hearts,
when lips tremble and tears flow.

Jesus walks beside them, but their eyes are kept from recognizing him.

Jesus asks them what they're talking about, and so Cleopas tells him

And then Jesus says, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe

all that the prophets have declared! Wasn't it 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.

This is important. As a biblical storyteller, I often use this passage when I'm teaching others how to learn biblical storytelling.

Jesus wasn't walking along pulling a wagon holding scrolls of scripture --

He carried the scripture in his heart.

This was an oral culture - people knew scripture by heart

And when you know something by heart, it is always with you.

And this passage shows us how Hebrew Scriptures are central for Christian faith.

Some people draw a line between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament.

Some people disregard the Old Testament all together.

But the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures,
were Jesus' scriptures

And here Jesus explains to them and to us, that he is the fulfillment of the Hebrew scriptures.

The death and resurrection of Jesus and the preaching of the gospel to the nations is continuous with a proper understanding of the law, the prophets and the psalms.

And there is power in our scripture. We sometimes refer to scripture as being alive. Later in this passage Cleopas and Mary say to one another 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'

There's power in scripture.

David Suchet is the British actor who plays Poirot in the Agatha Christie series. At Christmas time, Daniel and I watched a video of him on Youtube, reading the entire Gospel of Mark, to a packed Cathedral. As he was being introduced, we were told that David Suchet had been converted to Christianity by reading Paul's Letter to the Romans, aloud in a hotel room, from the bible he found in the drawer. There is power in scripture.

Jesus, Cleopas and Mary draw near to Emmaus.
Jesus walks on ahead,
but they invite him to stay with them.
We're told that 'they urge him strongly, saying 'Stay with us, because it's almost evening and the day is now nearly over.'.

They could have let him go on, but they don't.
They offer hospitality to this stranger they've met on the road.
They invite him in, to share a meal, spend the night.
Hospitality.
It calls to mind the story from Genesis 18, where Abraham's sitting at the front of his tent and sees 3 strangers.
He invites them to stay, gives them water to wash their feet;
some bread; kills a calf,
has Sarah make cakes
Then we're told that it's the Lord, and they are promised that even though both Abraham and Sarah are old, they will have a Son.

Jesus goes home with Cleopas and Mary.
The meal is nothing unusual at the outset:
The 2 disciples share their bread with a tired and hungry traveler.
They prepare supper, but Jesus' presence makes it a sacrament.
Luke clearly has the Eucharist in mind.
When Jesus is at the table with them, he takes bread, blesses and breaks it, and gives it to them.
Then their eyes are opened, and they recognize him;
and he vanishes from their sight.

Jesus has gone thru death and out the other side into a new world, a world of new and deathless creation.
He still has a physical body, but that body is somehow transformed.

Jesus is a guest, but he's the host because it's the Lord's Supper.
This is the first meal of the new creation.
The breaking of bread is the central symbolic action of Jesus' people.
The experience of breaking bread together is an experience with Christ.

Then Cleopas and Mary turn around and head back the 7 miles to Jerusalem.
They find the eleven and their companions who're saying
"The Lord has risen indeed, and he's appeared to Simon!"
And Cleopas and Mary tell what had happened to them on the road,
and how Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

They must have been tired -- walking 7 miles to Emmaus, and then
that very hour, turning around
and walking 7 miles back.
But they knew they needed to be with the others.

The Emmaus story calls us to return to community.
One of the things this pandemic has taught us,
is the importance of community.
When we're not able to gather with those we love and care about,
we realize how precious are those relationships
which we may previously have taken for granted.

Jesus walking along side of us
alive here with us, compassionate and curious,
an oh so human friend:
listening to our heartache, sharing his own stories of suffering,
warming us with his truth.

Jesus, the fulfillment of Hebrew scripture.

The power of scripture to make our hearts burn within us.

The importance and power of hospitality,

Jesus showing us himself as bread is broken.

The importance of community.
All of this we find in this gospel this morning.

This is Easter. The Lord is Risen; he is Risen indeed. Alleluia!