

Sermon - Luke 24: 13-35

Good morning everyone – and welcome. Today, we continue our journey through this season of Easter. It's a time of discovery (I think) that will carry us all the way through to Pentecost. (Pentecost, of course, is the celebration that marks the founding of our Church). In a way, I think these Easter services in the coming weeks can help us to get ready for Pentecost - because they're linked together. While we continue to share in the resurrection of our Lord – our experiences of renewed faith and hope in these coming weeks remind us that these blessings actually serve a purpose – they prepare us for a ministry that carries us out into the world. (Easter prepares us for this work.)

Easter affirms the experience of resurrection, but it also serves to remind us that our loving God continues to come to us in new and surprising ways – over and over again. So, it's a season of ongoing discovery – a time when the experience of God can form us and change us – preparing us for what comes next (a time when we will be called to stand as the visible signs of God's presence in the world.)

With that in mind, today we are reminded that Easter calls us to become part of something bigger – we truly become God's hands and feet – we become part of something more. Many people believe that this language is largely symbolic. When we talk about the visible faces of God or God's hands and feet at work in the world, some would say that these are symbolic references to God and our Church. But, I disagree. I think we are talking about reality of God - present and active in God's people, bound together by the Holy Spirit. As we continue through this season of Easter, we celebrate our participation in the resurrection of our Lord – a resurrection that we share with Christ – the experience of God rising within us in new and surprising ways. And, this was certainly true for the disciples. In the words of our Gospel, "...did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures..."

In our Gospel today – in this story about road to Emmaus, we hear one of the most powerful resurrection stories in the New Testament. It's a story that talks about the resurrection of Christ, but it's more than that. The Emmaus story is also a story about new life for the disciples – it talks about their experience – their discovery. As the story unfolds, we see the disciples change – they grow in their faith – we see doubt and sadness give way to the dawning of a new hope – a new joy. And, today we're reminded that this is a blessing that we share as well.

Our reading today begins with the two disciples travelling together on the road to Emmaus. We're told that they were talking quietly together about the events of the past few days. And, I imagine this conversation gave them time to reflect - and share their sadness and their sense of loss – it was a time for grief.

And, during their conversation, we're told that the risen Lord drew near and walked with them (it's a wonderful image). Of course, the story has an interesting twist. At first, the disciples didn't recognise Jesus. While walking together, they shared a conversation with this stranger – they talked about the events that led to Christ's death (but they still didn't recognise him).

Cleopas, one of the disciples, talked about his disappointment – he hoped that Jesus would be the one sent to redeem Israel. They were both saddened because they'd been separated from their Lord and master. And, they didn't really understand why. (They thought he'd failed.) The disciples were struggling with a crisis of faith.

And, surely this experience is common to us as well – we experience these times of confusion and doubt – when our fragile faith is tested by the experience of loss. (The loss of a loved one or a close friend – this is what happens when our life’s journey leads us in unexpected directions.)

In our reading, Jesus responds to the disciples – he responds to their sadness and their disappointment and perhaps even their bitterness. He tells them that the Messiah needed to suffer before entering into glory.

And, we’re told that Jesus continued to explain the will of God to them, talking about Moses and the ministry of God’s prophets in scripture, down through the years. (And, the disciples still didn’t recognise Jesus.)

So, in a way, our reading talks about our lack of understanding – our struggle to see the blessings of God – the grace of God – the opportunities presented by God – even when they are there, right in front of us (sometimes, we can be a bit like the disciples).

The stranger travelling with the disciples continued with them – he talked about the presence of God, walking with Israel down through the ages. And, the Emmaus story is a summary of that history. In the story, we see God walking with the disciples, just as he had walked with Israel down through the years – from one generation to the next.

And, with the whole story of Israel laid out before them, the disciples still couldn’t see their Lord, walking with them.

It wasn’t until much later, when sharing a meal with this stranger, that they finally recognised Jesus, in the breaking of the bread.

That night, while at table, we’re told that he took bread, blessed and broke it, and then gave it to them. And, their eyes were finally opened. They recognised Jesus in the breaking of the bread – in that shared blessing - in that familiar act – and they were raised up - they were transformed.

At that point, the teaching that Jesus shared on the road became personal. At that point, the disciples began to understand and share in the story of God’s presence – and they take their place in the story that began with Moses and the prophets and continued with Christ. Their faith was deepened and transformed – conditional faith was replaced with something deeper – something more profound and durable.

In that moment, I think the disciples come to see that the love of God is stronger and more durable than the cross – stronger than human weakness – bright and vivid when compared to the blindness of those who cannot see. And, of course, this is the story that we share today - the story of God walking with us as well – the divine becoming visible to us.

In the words of the disciples, “...did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures...”

In the days ahead, I pray that we will have an opportunity to walk with our God – I pray that we will come to recognise the love of God in our lives – I pray that we will come to see our place in this ongoing story... this story that began with Moses and the prophets and continued with Jesus and the disciples – a story that continues to unfold today with us, here in this place

The Lord be with you.