

Last week in the gospel of John we read about two of Jesus' post resurrection appearances. This week in Luke's gospel we learn two things, first that Jesus really does have a sense of humor, and second, we are reminded that the word disciple does not always refer to what we know as the twelve, or rather 11 since Judas' departure. In fact it shows that many disciples came together to understand the implication of Jesus' resurrection as he appeared to different people at different times, not only within the gospel of Luke but in Matthew, John, and the letters of Paul as well and it was in trying to make sense of these resurrection experiences that the church started to form.

On the evening of Jesus' resurrection Cleopas and a person who is not named, are trudging to Emmaus, shocked and saddened by the death of one whom they thought would be the one to redeem Israel. Their hopes have been shattered by his death yet they continue to take some comfort with one another. They have discounted the story of the women at the tomb and do not realize the significance of the empty tomb which was reported by their fellow disciples. Their faith has been limited by what they understand to be the power of God and Jesus' own claim to that power. Their reflections also show how Jesus' resurrection was not a one and done. It took time and multiple appearances for the impact to be believed, processed, and directed into action.

While the two disciples are walking they are joined by Jesus. The appearance of the resurrected Jesus is not the same as that of Jesus of Nazareth brought back to life so they do not recognize him and Jesus does not reveal himself to them. Jesus prods the disciples with questions to get them to share their understanding of what has transpired... which is pretty much doom and gloom. He nudges them into revealing their ignorance and, if truth be told, their lack of faith. He "tut tuts" at them and calls their lack of understanding foolish. Yet Jesus stays with them, much like Jesus was willing to have Thomas touch his hands and side if that was the proof he needed to believe. You have to wonder how they felt about being called foolish but then Jesus justifies his word by interpreting for them the role of the Messiah in light of the prophecies of the scriptures. Since Jesus had been making these references to scripture throughout his ministry they resonated with the two disciples. These references to scripture might not convince us today ...so how does Jesus reveal himself to you?

One of my favorite exercises when leading a vestry retreat is to send people off for an "Emmaus Walk" to have them set off on a walk and have a talk with Jesus. These walks can go from 15 minutes to half an hour or longer. It's a time to disconnect from an inward focus and an opportunity to engage Jesus. Think about the times you have walked with someone, the conversations you have had. Somehow the act of walking is relaxing and can quell anxiety by releasing it through the repetitive act of motion, of unconsciously placing one foot in front of the other. (Although hopefully you are keeping an eye out for where you are stepping!) It's

liberating to walk and talk and to do so as if Jesus were beside you is to deepen the experience. What would you say to him as you walked along? What questions would you like to ask him? Conversely, what would he say to you? How would he answer your questions? It's a great way to explore your own understanding of Jesus and to push the boundaries of your relationship with him. Try it sometime. When you are tired of being cooped up in the house and walking around the block has lost its appeal, invite Jesus to go along with you, it will change your whole perspective. Just remember to wear a mask.

The disciples obviously found their talk beneficial because once they get to Emmaus the disciples invite Jesus to stay with them. If you have read enough myths or fairy tales you know that inviting a mysterious stranger to stay is bound to lead to the unexpected. In the bible it usually means that God or God's messengers have turned up, like the three angels that visit Abraham and Sarah at the oaks of Mamre (and the next thing you know Sarah is pregnant at the ripe old age of 90). (Gen 18:1-14) So there are plenty of precedents for the surprise that happens next.

Another point that is applicable for us today is Jesus won't stay where he is not wanted; remember how he told his disciples to shake the dust from their feet if they were not welcome? *"But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'* (Luk 10:10-11 NRS) Jesus will always reach out but we always have to make a decision about whether or not we will accept his invitation and it is by the grace of God that we do so. Fortunately for the two disciples the disciples extended their invitation and Jesus accepted it.

Notice how subtly Jesus moves from being the guest to being the host when he is invited to supper. Before the disciples know what is happening "he took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them". Those gathered at the table that evening must have been mesmerized by the experience. It triggered their memories of Jesus at other meals and on other occasions when Jesus had done those very same things, perhaps some of them were even present at "the last supper" when Jesus told them to eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance of him. (Luk 22:19-20) After revealing himself to those with the eyes to see, Jesus vanishes.

If we were gathered for communion we might be singing Mason Martens' fraction anthem (S-167) that commemorates this moment:

"The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread.
The bread which we break, alleluia, is the communion of the body of Christ.
The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread.
One body are we, alleluia, for though many, we share one bread.

The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread.”

This anthem speaks to the experience we have in communion and also to the communion that we share by participating in the Body of Christ as the Body of Christ. We see the actualization of this as the disciples are energized by their experience of the risen Christ. They don't just sit down and say "Well golly Cleopas, that was some experience!" No, that very same hour they walk back to Jerusalem to rejoin the other disciples. This is no small decision. Emmaus was 7 miles from Jerusalem. They had already walked at least 7 miles that day. I don't know about you but I wouldn't consider walking yet another 7 miles a simple task. My feet are curling in agony at the thought. Remember they weren't walking on nice paved roads; they weren't wearing shoes with flexible memory foam cushioning and orthotic insteps. No, the disciples were wearing hard, flat sandals, and walking on roads that were uneven with ruts and stones and they were willing to walk back to Jerusalem without a second thought.

This need to connect with other disciples reminds us of the fellowship we have in church. Cleopas and the others needed to share this experience of the risen Christ, an experience that would corroborate the reports of the women and give some meaning to the empty tomb. But it is not just fellowship that is important it is the church coming together to process what it has experienced and to figure out how to share this new understanding of the risen Christ.

It took four gospels, the Book of Acts, the Book of Revelation, and 21 letters to lay the groundwork for such understanding, groundwork that even after 7 councils and the formulation of 3 creeds still hasn't resulted in agreement. The life death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ remains a great mystery. The fractured state of Christendom today reflects the multiple perspectives on an event that happened 2,000 years ago. Nevertheless there is one thing we can be sure of

“the disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread.”

And so do we.

Amen