

SERMON Pastor Cris

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen, indeed. Alleluia!*

It's still Easter. We've moved on in the calendar, we're cruising toward summer (or summer is already here, or maybe it's winter again). We're looking ahead to summer trips and Memorial Day. Some of us are getting ready for weddings. Baseball is in full swing – even if the Phillies have forgotten how to play.

But it's still Easter. In our Gospel reading today, it's literally still Easter. We do our best to tell the story in some kind of order, but then we jump around to different Gospels, and we hear the different ways the resurrection appearances were remembered. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus hasn't shown up yet.

The women went to the tomb – like Mary had in John's Gospel. They found it empty and two dazzling men told them that Jesus had risen, just like he said. They were excited, but the disciples chose not to believe. They dismissed this account. If we've learned **anything** from scripture, you'd think we would stop dismissing the account of the witnesses, **especially the women**...but we haven't seemed to learn that lesson yet.

Peter maybe believed – but maybe he was just amazed. And then we have Cleopas and his unnamed companion. Our list of apostles has never included Cleopas, but they clearly had been involved in all of what was happening. Because they were able to tell the whole story to this “stranger,” to this foreigner, to this person who seemed to be the only person who didn't *know what was going on*. Wink, wink.

In telling their story, they tell their new companion that they “had hoped,” perhaps the saddest line in all scripture. Past tense emphasized, no hope remained. They **had** hoped that Jesus was the Messiah, but clearly, he wasn't because he ended up on the cross. Clearly that wasn't the plan. Clearly God had no idea what was going on or how to go about redeeming the world, or at least Israel. Just ask these couple of fools who had given up hope when it all fell apart. Clearly, they must be right and everything that had happened was wrong.

Nevertheless, Jesus “came near and went with them...” If “we had hoped” are the saddest words uttered in the Gospels, then these words might be the most hopeful.

Two disciples – most often assumed to be both men, but some have suggested that maybe it was Cleopas' wife...one of the Marys who stood at the cross. Remember, the manuscripts weren't always clear, and the telephone game is real. These two disciples are

on a seven-mile journey away from Jerusalem, away from where everything had happened and a stranger simply walks up to them on the road.

We have to be honest, in today's world, we wouldn't take too kindly to someone who walked up beside us and said, "What are you talking about?" Keep in mind that the translation says they were "talking and discussing" which is the authors way of saying, they were in a pretty heated debate. They weren't sharing an idle tale. They weren't just chatting about the weather. They were getting deep into the pain of everything they thought they had lost.

And Jesus walks right there with them. The Gospels always have a deeper meaning – a deeper purpose to the story that we're being told. That's why this particular Easter story – the encounter on the road to Emmaus has become so beloved by so many. Perhaps that unnamed disciple is left anonymous so that we can more easily put ourselves on that road where all hope has been lost, where the pain of the past few days – or weeks, or years – is simply beyond us. That's when Jesus walks right up to us and goes with us.

Notice how the story goes from there. Jesus calmly listens to them tell the story exactly as they had experienced it. He doesn't tell them they're wrong. I'm not sure how hard his rebuke is when he calls them foolish, but he simply explains to them what they maybe needed to hear most: that all that had happened, all that the Christ had experienced at the hands of the authorities, the torture and death that had come on the cross, was not the end of hope. The story wasn't finished.

But in their grief, in walking away from Jerusalem, they couldn't see it. Even after Jesus opened up the scriptures and told them all that God had done with the chosen people of Israel to bring them to this moment, they couldn't see past their grief and the loss of their expectations.

Even as they strongly urged him to stay with them, "because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over," they didn't know what it all meant. It wasn't until he took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them that they could finally see.

I don't think that's a subtle hint. I don't think the writer of this Gospel – putting this story together in that first generation of Jesus-followers – was trying to hide what he was getting at. We know, from the writings that have survived, that the Christian community has always been formed around worship that has the breaking of bread at its heart.

I grew up in the Lutheran church that was trying to reclaim this meal. I don't remember exactly when my home congregation shifted to weekly communion, but I

remember it being celebrated monthly – and on special occasions. I remember the resistance to doing it every week. I've heard the logic, decades later to suggest that the meal isn't "special" if we have it every week.

But this meal **is** special because it **is** every week. Every week that we gather around a "table" so that the bread can be taken, blessed, broken, and given to us is a week that we get to see Jesus. "Blessed are those who believe who haven't seen," Jesus said last week. Different Gospel, different focus, I know, but the reality of this meal is that we believe because we see Jesus in the celebration at the heart of who we are. We see Jesus not just in the telling of a story, but in the sharing of a meal together, in the lives we encounter in this place, in the lives we encounter when we walk the roads of life outside these walls.

As wars rage and our capacity to be hateful and harmful to one another becomes more and more apparent, the news cycle begins to feel like the road away from Jerusalem, where everything is just wrong. There are days that I start to feel like I'm walking down the road to Emmaus with the past tense of hope. There are times when I so clearly recognize how horrible we can be to one another more than I can see the good that we can do. And that's when God walks right up next to me and walks with me.

Wednesday was the eighteenth anniversary of my mom's death. I started that day with a phone call from Ellen Garrison with the news that Bob was gone. It wasn't an easy day.

The next day, I popped into the preschool classroom to see why all the kids were screaming. Apparently, the floor was lava, and they had to get on their squares quickly. And then RJ asked if he could give me a hug. Before I knew it, I had about ten preschoolers in a group hug around my legs holding onto me. My eyes were opened, and I recognized him. And I had hope again. Amen.