**April 26, 2020 – Easter 3**

**St. Clement’s Anglican Church**

**Acts 2:14A, 36-41 and Luke 24:13-35**

I particularly love today’s Gospel reading about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, because it reminds me of the power of storytelling.

There are different ways of conveying information to people, and we see two of them at work in today’s readings. In Acts, we are told that Peter, addressing a large crowd, “raises his voice” and tells the assembled to “know with certainty” that Jesus, whom they crucified, was indeed the Lord and Messiah. He calls them to repentance and baptism, promising them forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. It says that he “testified with many other arguments and exhorted them,” until about three thousand people were baptized.

This is one way to get your message across – with a raised voice, with certainty, with arguments, and with a high-stakes offer. And, to all intents and purposes, Peter’s approach was effective. Three thousand people were baptized that day in the name of Jesus Christ. Sometimes a situation calls for a good strong leader telling us what to do. But most times, I tend to prefer the other method of communication; the one we see in the Gospel today. That method is storytelling.

By and large, I don’t think storytellers set out to convince people about something; mainly, they just sift through their lives, grab some of the rough, blackened rocks that emerge, and then polish them into colourful gems as a means of understanding their own lives better. Telling our stories helps us glean meaning from our past and our present circumstances. If others resonate with our stories and feel their impact, that is definitely a bonus, but it isn’t usually the primary goal. The goal is to listen to our own lives more deeply and attentively.

We can sometimes get our hackles up when someone uses the Peter approach on us. When we are told “with certainty” what we should think, or do, or believe. Stories, on the other hand, make no such demands on us, and for that reason we can often absorb them more readily. A guest speaker at a diocesan workshop once told us that when she opens a discussion group, she reminds people: “We want your stories, not your opinions.” While Peter might have changed minds, stories change hearts. And once a story has made it into your heart, it stays there – often in a way that someone’s opinion might not remain fixed forever in your mind.

We may have arms-length opinions about transit taxes or living wage campaigns, for example, but when a mom at our child’s school asks if you can walk her son home to an empty house on Tuesday because she is working the second job she needs in order to meet the bills, and you learn that she won’t be home until close to midnight because the buses don’t run often at night, that’s something that stays with us.

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus tells the two disciples the grand stories of faith, beginning with Moses. As he did so, they didn’t recognize him as their beloved friend. And part of me wonders if that’s because during this walk Jesus was operating in Peter mode. He told the disciples they were foolish, and slow of heart, and as it says in the gospel he “interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” It sounds to me like he told them what they should be thinking. They responded to this – their hearts burned within them – but still, they did not see him for who he was.

You may have heard the advice commonly given to aspiring writers: “Show, don’t tell.” If you want to capture your readers, offer to them a living, breathing, concrete detail that expresses a wider reality. Don’t tell them what you think; show them who you are.

At Emmaus, Jesus finally shows these disciples who he is. He is made recognizable and real to them in the breaking of the bread; in the sharing of the very stuff of life. Yes, Jesus was active in history and narrative – but he is most alive and accessible in the immediate. In the dropping off of groceries for someone in quarantine. In the telephone call we make to someone who is struggling. In the political actions we take to speak for the vulnerable in our society. In the prayer we utter as we are dropping off to sleep. This is the body of Christ at work, visible and vibrant. This is how we illuminate the good news of Christ alive in the world.

The Emmaus Road story follows an ancient narrative motif in which a divine being appears in disguise. Often it is to test people’s hospitality; the letter to Hebrews advises us to be generous in our hospitality, as it is by this means we sometimes entertain angels unaware.

In the Emmaus story, we often point to the disciples urging Jesus to stay for dinner as the central act of hospitality. But perhaps they showed even greater hospitality in listening to him talk during that long walk. In giving him time to tell his story, to interpret himself in the light of other ancient stories, to find words that sounded right to his own ear as he expressed some of these thoughts for the very first time since his resurrection.

If Jesus is at least somewhat like the rest of us, perhaps he needed that time on the road *to* Emmaus to find his way to revealing his true identity *at* Emmaus. We all of us have layers that we need to work through before we arrive at the truth at the very core of our being. Listening to each other as we work through those layers is an act of hospitality like no other. By telling our stories, we can find the golden thread of meaning in our experiences and, in turn, hear how the same thread is woven through the experiences of others.

We all have stories to share. They don’t need to be swashbuckling tales of grand adventure; we connect from sharing the love, humour, grief and fear that pepper our lives in the most ordinary of moments. In these Eastertide weeks to come, I will be offering an online program; a storytelling circle that will give participants an Emmaus Road of our own; a journey in which we can have some fun, dig deep, and get to know each other better. I’ll send out information about that in the week ahead.

In the meantime, let us strive to be as the Jesus who became visible in the breaking of bread. Let us communicate our faith not through argument, but by everyday action. And let the one who died for us be born to new life in each of us, today and always.

*- The Rev. Peggy Trendell-Jensen*