

Emmaus Road

Jesus' table ministry was the way he showed a depth of love unseen in his time. He ate and spent time with those considered unworthy of his attention. Even in his post-resurrection appearances, it was in the breaking of bread that he was "recognized"—perhaps because so many times in his ministry, at tables he invited people to open up and share with one another getting right to the heart of the matter. The message of Jesus was always about unconditional love.

The message of Jesus was always about community and coming together.

One of the cruelest aspects of this pandemic is its power to deny people the opportunity to come together. To celebrate together. Yesterday afternoon I saw a birthday parade of cars as I was leaving work and I burst into tears. It was supposed to be a joyous moment but I had spent my afternoon thinking about people who are grieving alone. I can't get off my heart and mind those who have lost loved ones without a proper chance to say goodbye. Whether Covid 19 related or due the horrific event of the shootings in Nova Scotia earlier this week loved ones are not getting a chance to be there for one another in the ways we hold dear.

Many of you know the depth of that pain more intimately than I do. It's not that people have not died alone in hospitals or in tragic events before, but at this time it is just one more layer of grief forced upon us.

Community is one of the things that makes life worth living, one of the things that can help us come into the fullness of who we are, and one of the things that usually makes life's hardest passages a little easier.

Our experience of community has been drastically altered. Community still exists, but sensory deprivation is a price we pay. I had a talk with Lisa Young this week and we both shared how hard it is for us to care for people without being able to touch. We want to be able to put a hand on a shoulder or give someone who is having a hard day a hug.

Loosing a sense of community in a state of fear must have been how it felt for the disciples on this first day of the first Easter week.

In today's scriptures these disciples are walking along the road in their grief heads hung low rushing out of Jerusalem, you can almost smell their fear in the story.

The interpersonal aspects of the story make it powerful. The fact is if we held the story Easter alone we likely wouldn't be able to believe it. A good friend and colleague of mine messaged me this week she said "This seems like the most authentic Easter season I have ever experienced. Is

Christ risen? I don't know. A couple people claim to have seen him, but I haven't. Still feeling afraid and anxious..."

Thank God we don't have to experience this Easter without the history of things that also bear witness: to life beyond death of hope out of fear. Thank God the risen Christ shows up not in cold doctrines and argumentative defences but in communion.

I am glad today's scripture finds us on a road on a journey of two people walking alone, afraid not sure where life will go from here. I like it because a walk to think things through is exactly where I most often find my reprieve.

Eric Barreto wrote

"A journey brings Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. A road is the narrative setting for the parable of the Good Samaritan. A road leads the prodigal back home to his father. Jesus sets his eyes toward Jerusalem in Luke 9:51 and travels there until Luke 19:28; this is known as the travel narrative of the story of Jesus.

The roads continue in the Book of Acts where, Paul encounters the risen Jesus on his way to Damascus. There is something about roads, and paths and the way they bring us together, the way roads become a symbol of a faith on the move."¹

This scene once again is set on the same day as the women's discovery of the empty tomb from last week. Two disciples are leaving Jerusalem to make the seven-mile jaunt to Emmaus. We don't really know why they are leaving Jerusalem, all we know is that they are grieved about their recent experience. They are talking and, hoping to make sense of the nonsensical, when Jesus himself walks alongside them and joins them on their journey.

But for some reason they don't recognize Jesus. Were they so grieved by their experience and so sure that Jesus was gone that they simply didn't expect him? Did Jesus look different after the resurrection? I don't know.

But "In a strikingly ironic moment, Jesus asks these two disciples what they are discussing, they are incredulous. Who doesn't know what has been happening in Jerusalem these days? It was all over the news."

And then they voice their dashed hopes: "... we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel..." We invested our hopes in this Jesus, but he was not whom we had hoped he would be. In response, Jesus outlines for them the meaning and significance of his own death, and life.

¹adapted from https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4442
Barreto Eric

And they start to listen ...and then as they approach their destination, the two disciples notice that Jesus plans to keep walking. They beg Jesus to stay with them. They offer hospitality this stranger. "But as soon as the table is set, Jesus upends the expected social roles. He becomes the host by blessing the bread and sharing it.

Now, remember, they still don't know that they are dining with Jesus once again; they don't realize that their dashed hopes are restored in this "stranger."

But when Jesus does the most Jesus thing of all, everything changes. Jesus is most Jesus at an ordinary meal. He infuses ordinary moments with significance because of the people gathered. Jesus is there at this table but so are the sinners and tax collectors with whom Jesus shared meals. But also at this table are the many powerful people because Jesus does not discriminate like we do.

In this sharing of bread at an ordinary table, we catch a glimpse of Jesus' transformative kingdom.

Jesus opens their eyes, helping them see that he was with them the whole time.

That's the thing - every time I look at scripture right now I realize that Jesus shows up in our grief in our fear in our lives not in lightning bolts out of the sky Jesus shows up in the everyday conversations and activities with our family and our friends and with people on the street. In this most Easter of Easters on Wednesday afternoon. I wasn't feeling hope in that moment.

I had been dealing with what felt like hard things and the optimistic, hope filled part of me was hiding deep. I walked out to look once again at the broken church window that had been smashed and was now boarded up and instead of encountering despair I encountered Joy and hope and a smiling face. Lisa Young almost bounded towards me - but of course she can't because well... physical distancing 'we gave the traditional 'air hug.' And I asked "how are you?" Setting myself up for another hard story knowing she works with the homeless and some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

First she gave a sigh with a motion like falling over and I braced myself a little more and then she said "I'm so energized and excited and hopeful." She went on to express how she knew that God was at work. She talked about how our world needed to be transformed from greed and power and hatred and arrogance. We needed to be stopped and reset and Covid is doing that (she continued to express that she does not minimize the stress and the grief and the pain for those who have lost loved ones and the many other trials of this time) still because governments and societies are finally seeing the most vulnerable and the base line needs of humanity a project we have been working on for about 10 years is finally coming to fruition. There will be 49 temporary homes built for people who are homeless or at risk of being so. People that some of us have been advocating for for years will finally be housed and cared for. How's that for God showing up in a really difficult time. Also how about Canadian senators asking for a guaranteed annual income or the fact that the Federal government is suddenly finding ways to offer remote

health care in First Nations communities in response. I'm hoping those things will remain after the scare of this pandemic.

There is so much talk about going back to normal but I found myself praying this week Dear God please don't let us go back to "normal." Sonya Renee Taylor wrote "We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature."

That's it. That is how I see God showing up these days. It is so hard to be pulled apart but it has given the world a pause. We are going to have to care for one another in ways we never have before in some cases and that is how the world is turning into a new kind of community. God is still at work. God always is.

This resurrection tale sounds like a distant fantasy, containing too many activities that we cannot enjoy right now, including travel and meeting and eating with strangers.

We might hear this story as outdated. The challenge, is too many of us and our neighbours are growing increasingly tired, frustrated, scared, lonely, sad, and broke. But I wonder where on this part of the journey you can see the resurrected Christ. Easter faith can be both a resurrection hope and a lamenting restlessness at the same time. At least that is what I have come to know in the last weeks.

I suspect many of you know that our current isolation, while good for saving lives, still feels fundamentally unnatural and worthy of lament. Some of you think it's been the greatest challenge of your life. It's OK to admit that to yourself, to your friends, and to God.

I'm so glad that Jesus doesn't reveal himself to Cleopas and his companion right away but he waits. Why does he wait? Jesus isn't testing, scolding, or humiliating the shell-shocked couple. He is, literally, journeying with them. There he is, present, as they narrate their disappointment and confusion. He does not cut them off. He knows that explanations will not cure their heartbreak and slowness to believe.

The time will come to redirect his friends, but first he lets them proceed one heavy step after another. Lament takes time. And sometimes lament is the journey that leads us, to the recognition and new life.

That new life walks alongside us, patiently, whether we know it or not.²

Amen

² Skinner, Matt <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5428>

