

Easter Evening

From the Bible: Luke 24: 13-16

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¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles¹³ from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

Well, it's two weeks after Easter, and we are in the Great 50 days- stories of resurrection, and appearances of the risen Christ, and wonder and joy, somehow its already seems like a long time ago, doesn't it? Easter has happened, we've maybe moved on, back to our worlds, and work, our worry.

The Emmaus story is one of my favorites. Jesus, incognito, and the explanation- even though we don't get to hear it, Jesus opening their minds to all the Scriptures so that they understand everything, and then the meal, and they recognize him and he vanishes, and then they think back to how their hearts were "burning within them when he spoke."

But I've stopped the Scripture at an earlier point because it stopped me. That line: "Their eyes were kept from recognizing him." It's really hard to read this story and put ourselves back in that place, because we already know the end. We know the end of this particular story and we know the happy ending of the resurrection accounts where people believe and later the disciples are fed breakfast on the beach by Jesus and Thomas comes to believe and we know that for them it turns out all right in their faith and trust- that these people, having seen, will have moments of doubt and face great hardship but will be the eye witnesses that carry the good news of Christ's resurrection to the ends of the earth.

But I want to take us back to Easter Night. When we don't know the end of the story. When we don't know that everything is going to turn out alright in our faith and trust. That we might not have come to believe. You know, like right now.

When we can simply turn on the radio and television or pick up the paper be bombarded with how everything is definitely not all right. There's a commercial on tv I saw recently- a father is drinking coffee and his eyes go to the television- where three talking heads begin to argue, their voices getting louder and accusations flying, then suddenly the picture changes, and a cartoon bear in a tree is plucking fruit and tossing it down below, to silly music. The father looks down, his son has picked up the remote and changed the channel, pouring himself a bowl cereal and

begins to eat, laughing at the cartoon. You see the father visibly relax, and reach for the cereal too.

If only it were that simple, although sometimes a bowl of fruit loops can do wonders, I think!

The two people on the way to the town of Emmaus, tradition has it that they are man and wife, the man's name is Cleopas, his wife is not named, are consumed with the sorrow of the last three days. As they walk, they are talking about the terrible events of the past three days. You know how your mind goes over and over and over again over something that has gone terribly wrong. You lie awake, you keep remembering. Your brain plucks at it, like a bird with a crust of bread, picking it up, dropping it again.

How can it have happened? What could you have done differently? If only . . . why didn't? . . . And you talk about it, if you're lucky, with someone who has shared it with you, both of you going over and over it again.

I think that's what those two disciples were doing, trying to make sense of something so sad, and so final.

Think back to a time, now, when you knew something was over. A relationship. A job. Terminal illness. The loss of a friend or family member. Moving away. Your health as you knew it, or maybe part of your body or spirit will never be the same again. This is how it is, for so many of us. It's Easter night.

It's Easter night a lot the time for us here! We don't know the end, we don't know how things will turn out, we cannot see the future, and if Jesus came and walked along beside us, our eyes might be kept from recognizing him too. Our eyes, wet from tears or dry with tears shed long ago, our eyes, chances are, would be unable to see Jesus. Sorrow does that. Fear does that. Loss does that. Uncertainty does that.

Often when I am tired at night I turn on PBS and try to find a nature programs. And I have come to realize something. There's an amount of tension in those shows, even though they are beautiful and wonderful and fascinating. Did you ever watch just one, and notice something- those animals, all of creation, lives right on the edge. The wolves in Yellowstone, there's a threat of a neighboring pack, will there be enough room for them all to hunt? The snowy owl in Alaska- the ice pack is melting and one parent has to be away from the nest for days at a time, hunting. Will the chick survive? The remaining parent cannot leave to eat.

The baby elephant in Africa gets caught in the muddy side of the creek as the herd crosses- the matriarchs trumpet and encourage, but cannot help it as it slips and struggles. Will it fall exhausted into the raging creek? My tears come as it finally makes it to the top of the riverbank. I'm exhausted.

The birds at my feeder being stalked by a Sharpshinned Hawk, the coyote I saw holding it's leg out stiffly before it, injured and slow moving. How will they make it? They live on the edge of night all the time.

It's Easter night. In our world the resurrection has come, and gone. And we continue to tell the story of both our despair and our hope because it is the only way that our eyes can be lifted up to see the reality of the new life that is, too, right before our eyes.

Because the end of the story is not the end of the story.

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.^[a] ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹ He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth,^[a] who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.

²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.^[a] Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.

²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."

Sometimes even in the middle of the good news we don't see it. You have to be able to see the miracle to know that it has occurred, don't you? Or maybe not. Maybe in the dark of Easter night something is happening. Maybe we can't see it.

What happens in the rest of this story? Jesus talks to them, Jesus walks with them, and they don't know it's him. But something else happens. These two sad, sorrowful people invite the stranger in. These two grieving, hurting people reach out to someone they don't know for a meal and fellowship.

And it is there, that they recognize Jesus in their midst. When blessing is given and bread is broken, and then POOF! He's gone! But he was there!

They're so excited they don't even eat- they get up and run seven miles back to Jerusalem, and find the others, who have also had a sighting and saying the Lord has risen indeed!

Easter night. The resurrection HAS happened, and . . . darkness may have fallen again. But we have had a glimpse- in these witness stories and in our own lives that something new can begin out of the ashes of disappointment and sorrow, loss and pain.

It's Easter night. In our world the resurrection has come, and gone. And we continue to tell the story. About then, and about now. A tiny chick hatches wet and wrinkled from its egg. A fawn with its spots will surprise us in the yard. The peepers, deep in cold water, still sing.

It is Easter night. But the eternal dawn has come. And we sometimes, are given the eyes to see it.

May we keep seeking. In spite of death and living on the edge with all of creation, we have a life beyond life. Jesus has risen from the dead, and we can move from light into Light. Our eyes, wet with tears or dry with tears shed long ago can be opened.

In remembering,

In hospitality,

In wonder,

In hope.

He is risen! He is risen, indeed.

Amen.