Grief, O Grief,
You deplete my joy,
Drain my heart,
Darken my eye, and
Deaden my ear.

When I am In the midst of you
You absorb my waking,
Invade my days, and
Repeatedly jar me out of sleep.

You, O Grief,
Would have me believe
That you are All I have left.

Grief is what fills Cleopas’ and the other disciples' very being as they walk to Emmaus. Senses clouded by the loss of Jesus, their leader and the one whom they hoped would redeem Israel. They fail to recognize him even as he walks and talks with them. Such is the power of grief. In grief’s throes we can miss what we long for most even as that longed for hope is right there with us.

Yesterday, at Grace Point Day, our Bishop George Young led the congregation gathered in the chapel at Grace Point on a lively exchange of reasons this story is so powerful. After a flurry of responses and images, our Bishop pointed out that when the disciples said to the man they viewed as a stranger: “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know?” Jesus does not come back at them, “Are you kidding me? It was me this happened to.” Rather Jesus invites them to tell him their story. Jesus listens to them instead of correcting them. Jesus walks with them rather than chiding them for failing to recognize he is the one they are seeking. While they do not understand with whom they are walking, they know they want “the stranger” to stay with them. But it is not until that moment in which their guest becomes their host, and in the most ordinary of activities, breaking bread, they truly see Jesus with them. It was Jesus all along, but their pain, their grief had clouded their ability to see that Jesus is with them.

So it is with us when we are consumed with grief. Jesus is right there with us, but with dulled senses and tunnel vision we miss the power that is always at our side. And Jesus is in the midst of all who suffer, calling to us to help be his hands and his feet to make his presence tangible to others. Here is just one example of how we might serve as Jesus’ hands and feet in this part of God’s vineyard.

My husband Mark’s life was devoted to caring for children, in particular children with heart disease. In our family’s grief we have been seeking a way to continue his particular
commitment to serving others in Christ’s name. The shocking reality that few know is that while we as a nation have worked to eliminate severe malnutrition in our midst, over 26.3% of our children, close to 65,000 people under the age of 18 here in our area alone, are food insecure. Food insecurity means that one literally does not know where the next meal will come from. This type of poverty, the lack of resources to secure a child’s next meal, has led to an increase in heart disease throughout our area. In fact, this type of poverty has become the single most significant predictor for heart disease. But today we at St. Francis can help make a difference by sharing our hands in packing sack packs for children in our area to have food over the weekend.

On May 1, after weeks of education, training, and inspection the Chattanooga Area Food Bank approved us as a site to pack sack packs for school children. These sacks will contain food items which do not require food preparation or even can openers, and will feed the children on those days they are not in school. Though we will only have a couple of weeks to participate before the end of this school year, by next fall we will be ready to show weekly God’s love tangibly with food for God’s little ones.

Please note this is just one way that we can show the reality that Jesus’ resurrection means he is with us. Day in and day out people around us are dealing with some type of pain, pain they may not tell us about but pain that is very real. It may be pain caused by loss of health, or loss of work for themselves or someone they love. It may be the pain of fear, fear that all on which they depend may disappear. It may be loss of a loved one, divorce or death, that has changed their world. The causes of the pain are many. But the story of the Road to Emmaus reminds us that even when in our pain we cannot recognize his presence, Jesus is with us. And because Cleopas and the other disciple did not stay in self-centered revelry but rushed out retracing the 7 mile trip to tell the others, we know that we must share this story too.

So today as we once again break bread together as Jesus did, let us pray to truly see Jesus in our midst. Let us open our hearts to be set aflame with the power of Jesus’ presence. Let us re-enter the world renewed in the joy, wonder, and grace of Jesus’ resurrection. Then as we go forth into the world, my brothers and sisters in Christ, let this refrain become our refrain:

Listen Lord Jesus,
Let my fears be few,
Walk one step before me,
I will follow You!