



April 26, 2020 • The 3rd Sunday of Easter
Luke 24:13-35
The Rev. Emily Williams Guffey

In the Gospel that we have just heard, we witness disciples walking together and talking about how radically their lives have changed in just a few days. Jesus, their beloved teacher, friend, and prophet, has died and they “had hoped that he was the one to redeem all of Israel” (Luke 24:21). They had hoped and thought that he was the Messiah, and now that he is dead, their lives as they knew them have ended, and the story in which they found meaning is finished.

Then out of nowhere, a guy comes up--they don’t recognize him--and asks, “What are you talking about?” They “stand still, looking sad” (Luke 24:17) and then they vent to him everything that they’re feeling: confused, distraught, out of hope. They stand still, and then keep talking.

Sometimes I look at commentaries about our scriptures, for reflection and preparation for preaching. Yet as our lives together now change so rapidly, often when I look back at these commentaries I think, “Oh, this doesn’t apply anymore--this was written back in the day when we could gather in person, when we went to work in our offices, when we went to the grocery store without fear, when schools were open, when our daily routines--though grossly imperfect--were operating.” Today, here we are, “standing still, looking sad.”

One commentary I found, however, resonates to this moment so strangely that I want to offer the words to you directly. This writer, reflecting on this passage several years ago, asks: “What are the conversations we have on the way to nowhere in particular when the horizon stretches only as far as the petty pace of tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow permits? What should we do when we have reached our wit’s end, when what we once thought was worth our lives has left us washed up emotionally, financially, physically, spiritually?”¹

This author notes that “the road to Emmaus,” the road that these disciples were walking, is a seven-mile journey, affording lots of time to “dwell hopelessness and helplessness.” When you’re walking, seven miles is a distance that can feel like it won’t end. Again, written during what I call “normal times” yet echoing clairvoyantly through today, the author continues that we hear this Gospel passage “three brief weeks after Easter Sunday, when the emptied-out pews [referring to attendance lower than on Easter Sunday] remind us of the disappeared who are headed toward Emmaus with no clue about where they are going” or what they are doing. “Neither will they recognize the one” who has come alongside them “and accompanies them. Present or absent, they talk along the way about all these things that have happened as though nothing more than death has happened. They wonder what to make of the troubles they have seen.”

¹ Cynthia A. Jarvis, “Luke 24:13-35, Third Sunday of Easter”, *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 421

And so do we. We and they stand still, looking sad. We stand still at the crossroad, yet we are not alone, are we. This author continues to ask, "When has God's Word interrupted the church's idle conversations and effectively called a halt to our frantic forward momentum? Where were we going [anyway] when the question of a stranger prompted us to confess that we had lost our way? What was it about the one who listened that turned the details of despair into beseeching?"

Stand with me, be with me, at this crossroads. Be still with me, pour your heart out to Christ, to the stranger: in prayer, in words, in silence. Take a walk with me, keep going with me. Then, whether out of faith or curiosity or despair or desire, urge Christ to stay, even just for a little while. Ask Christ to stay at your table.

I grieve along with you that we cannot gather at our table at Christ Church--we cannot feed one another and be nourished around that beautiful altar--so when I'm asking you to ask Christ to stay with you at your table, I'm talking about your messy kitchen table, your beautiful dining room table, the card table that you have set up to be your home desk, the kids' table at which they're trying to do their school work, the tray table at your hospital bed. I know we feel like they're not enough, I know it is not as we wish it could be, I know it's uncomfortable--*and* let Jesus meet you right there. I am trying to do the same.

I am trying to situate myself in this story, one that stretches back to the disciples, to Jesus, to their Hebrew ancestors, and even back to the days of creation when the Holy Spirit hovered over chaos and created life. I know, trust, and recognize that when I invite Jesus into my discomfort, loneliness, and mess, he will hold and bless whatever I give him. He will bless it as if it is the most beautiful thing he has ever seen, as if in its simplicity, it is enough. He will bless me, he will bless you, even when we feel like that isn't possible.

He will bless, he will hold, and then he will break. He will break what we offer, he will break the circumstances in which we find ourselves. In the breaking, we may feel despair that normalcy is lost; we may feel angry and discouraged that what we had been working toward so hard is now diminished; we may cry full, wet tears that things are not now how they are supposed to be. Whatever is broken--our bread, our routines, our rhythms, our expectations, our stuff, our homes, our relationships, our hearts--he will give back to us, new. All of these things, and our very selves, which we might think are devoid of their identity, far from their purpose, way out of balance, not enough, he will give back to us.

In so doing, we will recognize him. We will recognize him and we will remember that we, too, like those disciples, are people of the way, that we are always traveling, always changing, that we never have what we think is adequate or full, and yet we are always being made into what Christ desires us to be: blessed, broken, and given to one another.

We remember that we live in a story, in Jesus' story, a story that began when the Word was spoken into being. It is a story of resilience, hope, justice; it is a story about life always emerging out of death. It is a story, my friends, that continues.

In a poem called "Narrative Theology #1", Padraig O Tuama writes,

And I said to him:

Are there answers to all of this?

And he said:

The answer is in a story and the story is being told.

And I said:

But there is so much pain

*And she answered, plainly:
Pain will happen.*

*Then I said:
Will I ever find meaning?
And they said:
You will find meaning*

*where you give meaning.
The answer is in a story
and the story isn't finished.*

Thanks be to God.