

29 April 2020, The 3rd Sunday of Easter: Luke 24:13-35

The risen Jesus anonymously joined two travelers walking to Emmaus and asked what they were talking about. All their disappointment, grief, and fear welled-up. Luke tells us, *they stood still, looking sad*. We do not know how long they stood there but I think it was more than a pause. Cleopas presently jabbars on about the who, where and when of their anguish.

Jesus responds. To understand his response, we must keep in mind their state of grieving, fearful perplexity because Jesus always comes at the point of our deepest needs, and what we most deeply need from him is not always what we think. Upon hearing their report, he calls them “foolish” and “slow of heart.” This seems insensitive, even harsh. Jesus did not intend to worsen their anguish but wanted them to see things with new vision. Foolishness comes from ignorance; fools are not malignant, just helplessly unaware; Jesus challenges them to see beyond what they see. Perhaps this is why—as Luke writes—*their eyes were kept from recognizing him...*; so that once they did see him with physical eyes, they would know that He is always near, whether we are sensibly aware his presence or not.

Jesus also says they were “slow of heart” by which he does not mean emotionally deficient. In the ancient world the heart symbolized not one’s emotions, but the core, the essence of a person; to be “slow of heart” is to be unaware of or forgetful of one’s true nature as recipients of God’s mercy. Therefore, Jesus is telling them that, as real as their bewildered grief is, there is yet something more real, more true.

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. Resist the urge to imagine that Jesus did an encyclopedic Old Testament survey course, providing proof texts to verify that recent events were God’s will. This is clearly inconsistent with how the disciples characterized the scene later in the passage: *Were not our hearts burning within us...while he was opening the scriptures to us?* The Old Testament spoke of God’s judgment on evil and God’s fulfillment in the faithful. In Jesus God’s judgment is perfected—Jesus took the consequences of human sin upon Himself. The Old Testament also witnessed to the deep human longing for wholeness: salvation is the Biblical word. In Jesus salvation is real and available to all. To understand we must know the meaning of the word salvation: it means both to rescue and to heal. In Jesus, our deepest human longing for healing is fulfilled. To only comprehend Jesus’ death on the cross in a judicial way—Jesus died for our sins, to cancel our debt—is only part of the truth. Jesus brings forgiveness, healing, restoration, empowerment to those who live with faith in Him; he will indeed set us free from our sins *and* He will bring about in us new creation.

The travelers stop for the night and urge him to stay. He does so, but not as they or we expect. *When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed, and broke it and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight* (24:30-31). Jesus’ actions are identical to his meal with the disciples on the night of his betrayal. That evening, too, he took bread, blessed, broke and gave it to them. On the former occasion he tells them: “This is my body given for you...this, my blood of the new covenant.” At Emmaus he took bread, blessed, broke and gave. What can this mean?

The point of a meal is the eating; so long as the meat and potatoes, veggies and salad are on the plate they are only potential food. Food is for our nourishment. Food is ingested and through the processes of the body becomes one with us. So, too, with the Sacrament of our Lord’s Body and Blood. He commands us, “take and eat,” so that we become what He is: we consume the meal of His sacramental Body and Blood so that we may filled with Him, indeed, be consumed by Him. He is not content to be a guest at table; he wants to dwell within.

You and I have much in common with the Emmaus travelers. We, too, can be foolish and slow of heart. We must invite Him to stay with us. And we may learn from Him: exchanging His wisdom and God’s ways for our own; he invites us to sit at table with Him, receiving from His hand the food of heaven’s banquet and the drink of the new covenant. We need not see him with physical eyes for we will know him with such intimacy of joy and wonder. Jesus will not be “there” but here: in our midst, our minds and hearts; and even more, we will be in Him. Amen.