

Karen Hollis | April 24, 2022

Easter 2

Luke 24:13-35 (NRSV) Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. 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?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 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. 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.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. 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. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Christ's name we pray. Amen

I was at the Commons on Good Friday, at a little gathering where people were offering expressions of hope and prayer for the world. I looked at the time part way through and realized I had just enough time to walk the labyrinth before I needed to go to my next thing, so I quietly excused myself, walked down the path, slipped off my shoes and stepped onto the labyrinth. I'm learning to not fuss too much ahead of time around intentions upon entering the labyrinth, because for me, preparation is walking. It takes a few minutes of walking for me to become present and aware of my intention and what I bring into the labyrinth.

You can't get lost in a labyrinth; there is only one way in, and the same way out, so you can be slow or fast, messy, emotional, steady, playful, or prayerful, and the path will faithfully lead you to the center. The Commons doesn't have a big labyrinth, so just as I came into myself, I saw the final turn approach and stood for a few moments of gratitude at the center. I opened myself to be blessed and loved at the center of the ritual, turned, and carried the blessing along the winding path back out into the world, where the prayer gathering was just finishing the final chant.

I don't know how much the road to Emmaus would have felt like a labyrinth to the disciples, but the story can be seen as a kind of literary labyrinth, where the disciples step onto the road that only leads to one place, and at the center is a sacrament.

The disciples are a mess when they get on the road. They're probably terrified of the Romans and trying to keep a low profile, bewildered and confused by the news of the missing body, they are grieving Jesus, they are grieving their hopes and expectations that he would be the one to save them from oppression. They have a long way to walk, which is good, because they have a lot to discuss, a lot to process and work out.

The resurrected Jesus meets them along the way, hears their stories and their hopelessness. The resurrected Jesus, of course, *does* know what happened, but he lets them tell the story in *their own* words; he listens to everything that is just bursting to come out of them . . . before offering his shocking reply, calling them foolish and dense for not understanding. Perhaps this newly embodied Jesus was listening for how they are making meaning out of his death and resurrection. This is not the first time Jesus has called them such things and not the first time Jesus has become frustrated that the ones who are to carry on in his absence don't get it. Hopefully after sharing their story, the disciples have new space within them to hear Jesus and reframe the story in a way that sticks.

The disciples come to the table of their host in Emmaus, the center of our literary labyrinth, where the disciples' eyes are opened and Jesus is revealed as the bread is broken open for all to receive.

The table is such a powerful setting for this revelation. Jesus doesn't appear at the Temple or another location of political power. He reveals himself in the place of family, community, nourishment, where life and relationships are nurtured and strengthened.

When I made the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius last year, the Walk to Emmaus was one of the texts with which I prayed. In my imagination I was a disciple urging the stranger on the road to join us. Our friends greeted us at the door of their home and we told them the terrible and bewildering news of the past few days. When we sat down to eat, the stranger took the bread, broke it, and everyone gasped. He passed it to the people on either side of him, saying, "here, would you like some bread?" as if nothing had happened, while those around the table still hadn't taken another breath.

In my imagination, I saw the resurrected Jesus come through the veil and bless the people through the stranger on the road. How was this possible, I asked? What gives him this ability? I saw the Jesus who had died on the cross go down, down, into the depths of the earth, far away from the things of the living. He

emerges from that journey in a new body, a new form. In a way it's not so different from our labyrinth walk; he has to go before he can return and be a new blessing for the world. In his new body, he is able to manifest himself *through* the living, among the living, and then move back through the veil, away from their sight. Around the table at Emmaus, the resurrected Jesus vanishes from the table, leaving a grateful guest, sharing in the evening meal.

The people know what they saw; the moment was brief . . . and real. The time at the center of the labyrinth is often not long; the text says the disciples left that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. They received the blessing waiting for them at the center and began the long walk – perhaps they ran – along the road that only leads to one place; they carried that blessing back into the world.

We can only speculate about how this story came to be . . . one might recall the number of gospel stories in which Jesus breaks bread. John Shelby Spong thought that someone, perhaps Peter, must have broken a loaf of bread and had an epiphany: Jesus is present. He's present in the bread, he's present in our gatherings, he's present in the things that bring life and sustain life.

One commentator put it this way: “In the end, this story suggests that we should be looking for the risen Jesus not so much in the form of a single figure, but rather in precisely this graceful, liberating choreography of love, which can take all kinds of forms. After all, when the two disciples see Jesus along the road, they don't recognize him; and when at last they do recognize him, they no longer see him (Luke 24:31).”

So let us remain open and expect to be surprised by the one who is the liberating manifestation of love, here and everywhere. Amen.