

Sermon – 3rd Sunday of Easter (Year A)

Scripture Texts: Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35
Sermon preached at Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Episcopal Church

Focus Statement: *As followers of Jesus, we encounter him on the road (individual, specific, rare), in the bread (communal, sacramental, regular), and through the stranger (embodied, missional).*

Loving God: May my spoken words be faithful to your written Word, and lead us all to better know the living WORD, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Outline:

1. Encountering Jesus on the Road
 - a. “But we had hoped...”
 - i. Can you feel the ache of these words? These disciples of Jesus had just seen all their expectations for the future collapse around them, leaving them confused and sad (at the very point when it all seem to be coming together at last!).
 - ii. “Their eyes were kept from seeing him” – perhaps by their grief, their prejudice, their false expectations of Jesus. But, he comes to them and helps them to make sense of things, to begin to believe the reality of the resurrection – to believe that this may all have been part of the plan...
 - iii. Connect to our own places of disappointment, of our own struggles to see and to believe; we live in a time when everything seems to be coming apart.
 - b. Reading *The Pastor* on the road
 - i. Discerning my calling after the layoff
 - ii. Lots of long walks with my BCP and Bible, but also with books
 - iii. Peterson’s memoir was pivotal in helping me to see that the classroom was coming to feel too small
 - c. Jesus does come to us on the road
 - i. The good news of Easter is that the risen Jesus does meet us on the road of life, in the places where we feel hopeless or afraid (even if that recognition is sometimes seen only in retrospect).
 - ii. Individual & Specific– These “on the road” encounters provide what we need in particular time and place, giving us new insights, helping us to make new sense and new connections, sustaining our hope.
 - iii. Rare – However, as much as we’d like such encounters to be regular and predictable, they are not for most of us. And, that’s not due to lack of faith; even for the earliest disciples, the risen Jesus met them for a few days, but then ascended into heaven.
2. Encountering Jesus in the Bread

- a. "Then their eyes were opened..."
 - i. So, Jesus comes to us on the road, in ways that are individual & specific, helping us to make sense of our lives and our world. But, this coming is rare and we need something more to sustain our faith.
 - ii. Consider how, in this Gospel passage, the disciples ultimately recognize Jesus: "he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread."
 - iii. As they begin to make sense of what has happened in Jesus' death and resurrection, they have the sense to invite him to dinner.
 - iv. As he takes the bread, blesses it, and breaks it, the parallel to the last supper is intentional. We don't know for sure whether these two disciples were there, but it seems that they had at least heard about Jesus saying "Do this in remembrance of me."
 - b. Sacramental theology
 - i. And we do, as a community of disciples, continue to do this in memory of Jesus. But why? What does it mean?
 - ii. We believe that the Eucharist is a sacrament: an "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." We are embodied creatures, not just brains or souls – so we need embodied experiences of grace, of God's presence.
 - iii. Jesus says, "this is my body" and "this is my blood," and we believe that he is truly present in the elements of communion – though we don't insist on precisely defining how he is present. As we talked about in Maundy Thursday, this is a place where time bends and connects us to the night of the last supper and to Good Friday and to Jesus' loving sacrifice.
 - iv. Eucharist comes from the Greek word for Thanksgiving. In it we give thanks, for our eyes are opened to a reality that is greater than just the physical world – to a transcendent grace and love that is all around us and that sustains us.
 - c. Our hope is to see the transformation of all creation, for all of creation to become sacramental, for God's presence to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. And so we come regularly to experience Christ's presence in the breaking of the bread.
3. Encountering Jesus in the Stranger
- a. On the road, in the bread, and...
 - i. We've seen that he comes to us on the road, in individual, specific ways, but that this is rare.
 - ii. We've seen that he comes to us in the bread, in corporate and sacramental ways, and that this happens regularly.
 - iii. But there is one last way in which Jesus is revealed in this passage.
 - b. "Are you the only stranger who has not heard...?"

- i. The Greek word for stranger is bigger than just someone unfamiliar. It is the term used to refer to a resident alien, a sojourner, or an immigrant. And, like in our day, it was a precarious thing to be an immigrant. They had fewer rights, were subject to special taxes, and were dependent on the goodwill of others.
 - ii. Jesus comes to us in vulnerability, both in the incarnation, but also through those in need around us. As he teaches in Matthew 25, whatever we do for “the least of these” we also do for Jesus. His coming through the stranger is an embodied coming!
 - iii. More, this is a missional coming. In recognizing the presence of Jesus in the strangers and the vulnerable in our midst, we also become the presence of Jesus, the hands and feet and hearts through whom the kingdom of God is brought near.
- c. Call to community in each type of encounter
- i. The good news of Easter is that Jesus is risen, and that he does come to us in our places of grief and fear. Moreover, we can help each other to recognize his presence!
 - ii. So, rather than living only in grief and fear, let us look for Jesus, on the road, in the bread, and through the stranger – and let us follow him together.

Amen.