

Easter 3 A 2011 Luke 24: 13-31

Have you ever noticed that when the writers of the four Gospels come to the most important part of the Jesus story they are telling, they seem to tell it in whispers?

The gospels cite no angelic choirs to proclaim it. No great light in the sky. Not a single soul was around to witness whatever the astounding event was like.

Mary Magdalene thought it must be the gardener she was encountering, standing there in the shadows.

The disciples at first dismissed it as too good to be true, and then found it too good not to be true.

Thomas was still not convinced until later when he saw Jesus' wounds.

And when Jesus joined his friends at daybreak on the beach as they were fishing, they failed to recognize him until he asked them to join him in the breakfast.

The way the Gospel writers tell it Jesus did not emerge from  
death in a blaze of glory.

It was more like a candle flame in the dark, flickering first  
here, then there, and then in that place.

Had they been making the whole thing up to convert the  
world, I should think they would have written something  
completely different; maybe something theatrical like how the  
Second Coming of Christ is described in the Book of  
Revelation;

“Armies of heaven arrayed in fine linen—flames of fire---  
diadems.”

They are witnessing as truthfully as they can. You must lean  
close to the writer to hear, because they are telling us so  
softly, softly as a secret so precious, so holy and fragile and  
unbelievable that telling it in any other manner might  
dishonor it.

On Easter Day the church shouts the news, sings from the top  
of it's lungs, pulls out all the stops, brings out the biggest  
organ compositions, rallies all the singers, wears the new

shoes or shirts, arrays the sanctuary in lilies, and packs the  
pews.

Maybe that is why the Sundays after Easter are relatively  
quiet, comparatively subdued, and low-keyed,  
closer to how the Gospels portray that the resurrection  
actually took place.

But more important still, close to the reality of the  
resurrection as you and I are apt to experience it.

More like the day that Luke describes in his account of the  
two disciples on their walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus seven  
miles away.

They had heard the women's report about finding the tomb of  
Jesus empty that morning, but as Luke writes, it  
"Seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them."

They found it to be unbelievable.

And then as they trudged along with the evening approaching and the sun starting to set, Jesus himself---risen from the dead and alive again---joined them on their way.

However, they did not know it was Jesus, because, again as Luke puts it, “their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”

What haunting words those are, and all the more haunting because they remind me so much of my own eyes and because I suspect they may remind you also of yours.

Eyes that seem to see most everything at times except what matters most.... struggling to see and understand what may be right before our very eyes.

I lived in Virginia some years ago. It was a time of inner struggle for me. I often ran or walked in the morning, taking my path through the nearby beautiful golf course. It was a gorgeous place, especially when the wild redbud and dogwood bloomed profusely within the adjacent forest.

My spirit and mind were so often filled with reoccurring worries and concerns and painful doubts, and I sought the soothing endorphins of exercise as much as any resolution of my worrisome spirit.

Nearly every morning I would remember to notice one particularly magnificent oak tree off to my left, with its marvelous canopy of branches.

I needed to look at that tree, being drawn to it like some mighty faithing oak.

One morning rather unexpectedly, I walked over to it and stood underneath its sheltering branches and imagined its roots that went out underground as wide as did its branches.

Who knows how many years it had been there with its pride and gallantry, its sheer endurance?

I found myself touching the oak, with both of my hands, not so much to bless it but to ask for it's blessing, so that I might be drained of my distress and move toward my future and

even my death with something like it's stunning strength and  
grace and courage.

“When I was hungry, you gave me food, when I was naked  
you clothed me,” Jesus said.

And “When I was a tree,” he might of said, “you blessed me  
and asked my blessing.”

To believe that Christ is risen and alive in the world is to  
believe something like that.

It is to trust that there is no place or person or thing in the  
world through whom we ourselves may not be made more  
alive by Christ's presence and life.

And it is to have confidence that whenever we are made more  
brave and strong and beautiful, we may be sure the Christ is  
present with us, even though more often than not our eyes,  
like the two disciples' eyes, are kept from recognizing him.

What kept them from recognizing him, of course, was that  
they thought he was dead and gone, and when he asked them  
what they had been talking about, that is what they told him  
in words as full of pathos as any in the NT.

“We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel,” they said, but by then their hope was as dead as they believed Jesus was himself.

They had gone to the tomb to see if he was alive as some believed but had found no trace of him.

Like on my many runsz through that VA country club, they were so lost in their sad and tangled thoughts that they did not recognize him any more than you and I would probably recognize him as we walk through our little worlds.

Because, like theirs, our eyes are so often too accustomed to darkness, and our faith not strong enough to believe in the reality of light even if it were to blaze up before us, or so it seems.

Many of you remember the film *Schindler's List* about the complex Holocaust figure Oskar Schindler, wartime profiteer, boozier, and friend of the Nazis.

Schindler became obsessed with saving as many Jews as he could from Auschwitz, by commandeering them to work in his factories and ended up saving some eleven hundred of them.

The film is about a dark and anguished world where again and again in the faces of the persecuted Jews as they appear on the screen you see the face of Christ while their persecutors saw only a people to be eliminated from the face of the earth.

It is about an inhuman, young commandant of a Nazi death camp who has the face of a fallen angel, the face of someone in whom the Christ who dwells in all of us is as dead as the Christ who dwells in all of us can ever be. And it is also the story about a little girl in a red dress.

It is filmed almost entirely in black and white like a documentary, but every once in a while, usually in some crowd scene of children playing or people running or being herded into freight cars, you see, flickering like a candle flame in the

seething grayness, one touch of color in the form of a little  
girl dressed in red.

You see her in her red dress hiding herself under a bed while  
the Nazis set about systematically shooting all the Jews they  
can lay their hands on in the Krakow ghetto.

And then again here, then there, until finally for the last time  
you see a patch of the same red dress buried almost out of  
sight in a mountain of the dead, left when the massacre has  
been completed.

I believe that although the two disciples did not recognize  
Jesus on the road to Emmaus, Jesus recognized them.  
That he saw them as if they were the only two people in the  
world.

That the reason why the resurrection is more than an  
extraordinary event that took place some two thousand years  
ago and then was over and done with, is that  
even as I speak these words and you listen to them, he also  
sees each of us like that.

In this dark world where you and I see so little because of our  
unrecognizing eyes, God, whose eye is on the sparrow sees  
each one of us as clearly as the child in red.

I believe that because he sees us, not even in the darkness of  
death are we lost to him or lost to each other.

That whether we recognize him or not, or believe in him or  
not, or even know his name, again and again he comes and  
walks a little way with us along whatever road we are  
following.

And I believe that through something that happens to us, or  
something we see, or somebody we know----who can guess  
how or where or when...he offers us, the way he did at  
Emmaus, the bread of life, offers us a new hope, a new vision  
of light that not even the darkness of the world can overcome.

That is the word that we sounded forth on Easter Sunday with  
silver trumpets.

And when Easter is past and the trumpets have faded away to  
an echo,  
that is the word that is whispered to us like a secret in the  
dark.

The holy and saving word that flickers among us like a red  
dress in a gray world.