

Easter 3  
Year A 2020  
Luke 24:13-35

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

We revisit today the well-known gospel passage from Luke known as the Road to Emmaus.

Jesus has been crucified, entombed, and resurrected.

The problem, though, is that none of Jesus' followers can wrap their hearts and minds around His resurrection.

This includes Cleopas and his companion as we encounter them on their way to Emmaus.

They have left Jerusalem and are making the seven mile trek to Emmaus.

As they walk they are reliving the events of the previous days.

They encounter a stranger who inquires what they are discussing. Cleopas and his companion fail to recognize Jesus, their leader and teacher.

In fact, we are told that, their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

They recount the events of the previous days for the stranger ending with their companions' visits to the empty tomb where Jesus had been laid.

Jesus retorts:

Oh how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!

As the group reaches the village,  
Cleopas and companion urge Jesus  
to stay with them as it is nearly evening.

They extend hospitality to this stranger  
who has just castigated them  
for their apparent lack of understanding  
of the scriptures related to the Messiah.

Cleopas and the unnamed companion  
sit at table with Jesus  
and as he breaks bread,  
blesses it and offers it back to them,  
their eyes are opened  
and they recognize their teacher,  
the Messiah, Jesus the Christ.

And then he vanishes.

Jesus sits at table breaking bread with sinners,  
tax collectors, rich, poor, female, male, Gentile, Jew,  
the unclean throughout Luke's Gospel.

Just four chapters earlier,  
Jesus breaks, blesses and shares  
the fish and bread with the crowd of five thousand.

And ultimately this is what resonates with his disciples,  
this is the act that opens their eyes  
and reveals the true nature of Jesus  
and the kingdom He has ushered in.

In the words of commentator Eric Barreto:

*In Luke, eating is a radical act because it breaks down cultural boundaries.*

*In Luke, the resurrected Jesus shares that bread once again with his followers.*

*And in feeding them, Jesus opens their eyes, helping them see that Jesus was with them the whole time.*

In working with this gospel reading, another phrase stuck out for me:

In verse 21: "... we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel..."

We had hoped.....

How many times in our lives have we heard that phrase?

A recognition of the depth of sorrow, grief, loss.

We had hoped.

A statement in the past tense.

A recognition of the inability to see a future,  
a way forward, a seemingly inadvertent admission of despair.

This caught my attention for the first time really.

I must have heard or read this gospel passage hundreds of times in my lifetime.

We had hoped.

It reminded me of times in my life  
where a set of circumstances  
left me wondering if there was a way forward,  
if there was life after death,  
if there was resurrection or new life as promised.

I think of the many hundreds and thousands of people  
across the globe today and the multitudes of: We had hoped

We had hoped he/she would get better;  
the stay at home order wouldn't last this long – wouldn't be extended;  
we'd be able to weather this storm and keep the doors open.

The numbers of weddings, graduations,  
birthday and anniversary parties cancelled,  
newborns not yet cradled by family,  
deaths and burials gone unattended by loved ones.

It's no surprise we might be having a hard time  
believing in life after death,  
of resurrection.  
of Jesus as our companion in the Way.

But then I also thought of  
all the new ways we have found  
to enter into communion, community.

The Facebook shout outs;  
the seemingly simple acts that help to support small businesses;  
the acts of kindness which support those who need help getting what they need;  
the endless ways in which the entire world now uses Zoom, Face Time, Google Chat.

And the new and innovative ways  
in which communities are attempting to ensure  
that those who are suffering the most can be take care of.

This is going to be a long haul.

From what we are hearing,  
we are not going back to “normal” anytime soon, if ever.

We will no doubt craft a new normal in the days, weeks, and months ahead.

In the meantime, we have the opportunity to reach out  
to those who are experiencing a “We had hoped” time in their lives.

We can reach out in the sure knowledge that each death,  
of whatever kind, brings forth new life.

That we are never alone.

That Jesus’ promise is to be with us always.

Even during the We had hoped times.

We have the tools to break bread with each other  
in new and different ways,  
virtual potlucks, movie nights,  
book clubs, bible study, prayer groups,  
knit or sew alongs.

We can reach out to the organizations  
we support and ask how best to can help.

Are you a person who might be able to help in person,  
Or lend some financial support,  
or give a shout out to the great work of an organization on social media?

We have more ways than I certainly ever knew about to be in touch with family  
and friends to see how everyone is holding up.

Sometimes just a call checking in can make a huge difference.

I've literally seen my family more in the past month  
than I have in the last year or more.

Jesus has assured us there is a time for resurrection,  
for new life to come forth.

But we have to make that happen.

We have to live into the knowledge  
that we are resurrection people.

And when we do,  
the world is transformed into the kingdom  
that Jesus has made known to us in the breaking of the bread.