

## “THEIR EYES WERE OPENED”

Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19; Luke 24:13-35 April 26, 2020

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A preacher's kid was playing with his friends  
shimmying up trees, skipping

rocks across the pond, and wrestling his buddies to the  
ground

As usual, he played harder and got dirtier than anyone  
else in an effort to shed the PK label

When the boy's mother called him home for dinner, she  
took one look at him

and said, "Show me your hands!"

The boy rubbed his hands on his blue jeans and held  
them up

--mom shook her head and scolded, "How many times  
do I have to tell you

to wash your hands before dinner? Dirty hands carry  
germs and germs make

you sick!"

"Now march yourself into that bathroom and get those  
hands clean! Then

come back in here for the blessing!"

The boy turned to go

But as he slunk out of the room, he was heard to mutter,  
"Germs & Jesus,

Germs and Jesus! That's all I hear about 'round here and  
I've never seen either one of them"

Cleopas and his unnamed companion on the road to  
Emmaus hadn't seen Jesus either

And they were dubious of the women's report of an  
empty tomb presided

over by angels

--even when the risen Lord sidled up beside them and  
asked, "What are you

two talking about?" they didn't recognize him

Lk's Gospel says, "Their eyes were kept from  
recognizing him" (24:16)

Perhaps you feel a certain kinship with these two  
Emmaus Road disciples

Because like them -- and the frustrated Preacher's kid --  
You haven't seen

Jesus either

--and despite all this excited Easter talk about  
experiencing the Risen Christ, you sometimes wonder if  
that's just the creation of an overworked imagination

And yet, this story of the Emmaus road teaches us that  
sometimes we look for

the Christ in the wrong place or in the wrong way

For he comes to us, not in dramatic displays of power .

--but quietly, gently, subtly . . .

knowing him

tell their story: "What are you talking about?" he asks

The question stops the two Emmaus disciples dead in  
their tracks

"Are you the only person in Jerusalem who doesn't  
know what happened

to Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in word and  
deed?"

--"Tell me," Jesus answers softly. "Tell me" . . . So they  
do.

This much you know: the Risen Christ sure hasn't  
shown up lately . . . for You

And then only to those who show a passionate, persistent  
interest in

Jesus first engages the two disciples en route to  
Emmaus, by asking them to

--faces etched in pain and loss, they look at Jesus in disbelief and ask,

I know a courageous young woman who has fought long and hard to hold onto

her faith in the wake of a crippling brain injury years ago

I admire her grit and courage so when she speaks, I listen

--recently, she sent me a quote that touched me, especially since it came from her

"I no longer look for the good in people, I search for the real ... because

while good is often dressed in fake clothing, real is naked and proud no matter the scars"

Ironically, the capacity to see or experience the risen Christ begins not with faith <sup>but</sup>

with utter honesty about our lack of faith

And walking down the road with Jesus doesn't require some sort of stuffy,

churchified goodness, but only a confession of how badly we need help or hope or healing

--that's the first lesson on the Emmaus Road: With Jesus, it is far more

important to be real, than good

After Jesus hears the story of the two forlorn disciples, he revisits and reshapes their story in light of the Bible And he helps them read the Bible in a new way

--no longer as a treatise on the triumphant nationalism that was the state

religion then and is the state religion still

But rather as a primer on the costly, scandalous, suffering love of God

--"Was it not necessary that the Messiah should have to suffer before

entering into his glory?" asks Jesus

And that's when the two disciples plodding down the road discover

they've been looking for the wrong kind of Savior . . . and the wrong kind of God

In John Gunther's remarkable memoir of grief, *Death Be Not Proud*, he writes

about crying out to God early in the illness that would claim his son:

"God, is there nothing I can do for my boy?"

As the days turned into weeks and months--and nothing changed--Gunther's <sup>plea</sup> became more desperate:

"God, is there nothing You can do for my boy?"

--still nothing changed, until at last, the dying boy himself re-framed his

father's dilemma: "Dad, maybe God is trying to do something for You"

And so it was that in the end, what changed was not the course of the

boy's illness, but rather the life of the broken-hearted father who had to let him go

The God who draws near in Jesus does not deliver us from the pain and peril of being human, any more than God delivered Jesus from his cross

--then in tender, faithful love, this crucified God works to transform

meaningless suffering into redemptive suffering

From whatever cross we're hanging on, God plots yet another Easter

. . . only this time not for Jesus but for You

Jesus has listened attentively to their story, and he has re-framed their story in the light of God's suffering, redemptive love

Now the party arrives at their destination, the village of Emmaus

Instead, this God crawls up on our cross with us to make sure the pain and

loss is not all there is

Cleopas and his companion continue down the road

--Jesus nods his goodbye and starts on down the road

But the two disciples won't hear of it

They have sensed God's nearness in this stranger

So Cleopas and his fellow pilgrim urge Jesus to stay the night

"It's almost evening and the day is nearly done. Stay with us!" they

plead

Just like every year during the Xmas music festival at Knollwood, all the choirs-- children, youth, and adult -- leave the sanctuary singing that hauntingly

beautiful song:

Stay with us. Lord Jesus, stay with us. Stay with us, it soon is evening and night is falling

This plaintive music is especially powerful in the evening service as the

singers slowly march out of the darkened sanctuary, their faces illumined only by the candlelight cupped in their hands

--and every year, even though I know what's coming, I can never stem the

tears

What if the Emmaus disciples had let Jesus continue on his way?

What if they had not pressed him to stay?

--then their story -- like our story -- would end very differently

This mysterious, unsettling Presence would slip away -- like a doe

disappearing into the woods -- because we never pled with an anguished, earnest

heart, "Stay with us. Lord Jesus, stay with us!"

But the two disciples do plead and Jesus does stay

And in the climatic scene of the story, Jesus takes the bread from the table

as they had seen him do so many times before

--he blesses the bread, then breaks it and hands a soft morsel to each

person gathered 'round the table And in that instant, they recognize him

--and in the next instant, he is gone

But not before they know -- in their heart of hearts they know -- "The

Lord is risen! The Lord is risen, indeed!"

In her book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Annie Dillard describes seeing a

mockingbird dive dive off the rooftop of a four-story building

"The mockingbird took a single step into the air and dropped. His wings were still folded against his sides...(as he) accelerated thirty-two feet per second through empty air. Just a breath before (being) dashed to the ground, he unfurled his wings with exact, deliberate care . . . and floated onto the grass"

--Dillard was the only person to witness this wonder-filled moment

no one hears it, does it make a sound?"

performed whether or not we sense or (see) them. The best we can do is try to be there

Maybe that's who and what a Christian is

Someone who's decided that when Jesus shows up, the least we can do is

try to be there

So we amble down the road together in this pilgrimage  
called church

believe again that some kind of Easter beckons on the far  
side of every cross

Leading her to old philosophical question, "If a tree falls  
in the forest, and

--"The answer must be," Dillard writes, . . . "that beauty  
and grace are

And we tell our stories to one another in the hope of  
being heard

--and then pray God, someone tells the God Story that  
helps us hope and

And when we experience a God Wink or holy  
coincidence -- or are surprised by a grace or strength not  
our own -- -- we don't rationalize it away

Instead, we gather around a table laden with bread and  
wine and plead,

"Stay with us. Lord Jesus, stay with us"

--and always he does . . . just before disappearing . . .

Only to surprise us again a little father down the road

\* \* \* \* \*

"Stay with us. Lord Jesus, stay with us."

Awaken our hearts to your living presence. Shape and  
sustain us by

your Word and Spirit

--make us joyous witnesses to the power of your life let  
loose in the

world

In your name we ask this of our loving Heavenly Abba,  
Amen.