

The Third Sunday of Easter
April 30, 2017
Luke 24:13-35

My sisters and brothers in Christ,

These Sundays of Eastertide are a treasure – they allow us to hear the stories of the First Easter, the stories of the Resurrection and how the Risen Christ appeared to his people.

Two Sundays ago, we heard how Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb saw someone she guessed was the gardener, and then realized, after this person called her name, that it was indeed the Risen Christ. She heard, she saw, she believed. Last Sunday, Thomas said he would not believe until he could see the mark of the nails and the wound in the side. Jesus appeared, spoke to Thomas and gave him that evidence. He heard, he saw, he believed. Today, we hear from Luke's Gospel – another appearance of the Risen Christ. It was late afternoon on the first Easter Day. But this time, the details are strikingly different. One of the unique features of this Gospel is the spotlight on ordinary people...men and women of the kind who do not get too much attention in other gospels. And here on the road to Emmaus are two such people. They are not disciples, they not apostles, they are not "somebodies," they are not like Mary Magdalene or Thomas in the inner circle closest to Jesus – but they are his followers. Just two ordinary people, the salt of the earth. Luke identifies one as Cleopas – he was never heard from before and will never be heard from again in the Bible. And his traveling companion? We don't know. We don't even know if it is a man or a woman. This second person says nothing, is never described, does not have a name. Both are merely folded into the multitudes – into the anonymous "them" – the followers of Jesus. Maybe they were in the multitudes that Jesus fed – or healed. We don't know, but there is room in their anonymity for us to squeeze in, for us to be on that road to Emmaus. There is room for us in this story that takes place in the late afternoon on the day of the Resurrection.

We do not know these two people, but we know from Luke how these people feel. We can tell it from what they say. They are still talking about the events of the last three days. They are confused, disappointed, baffled. They are trying to figure out what the events mean – they haven't come to any conclusion – they don't have an interpretation. They are just walking from Jerusalem, west to Emmaus, as twilight surrounds them. What we learn is that the two people know everything they need to know to make sense of what has happened – but they can't put the pieces together. They have not yet reached that state where believing is seeing.

This mysterious stranger – after he hears them recounting what has happened in Jerusalem – this stranger chides them for their foolishness, for being slow of heart to believe the prophets, to believe scripture. Then this stranger leads them in bible study of the only bible that exists: The Hebrew Bible – a review, beginning with Moses and going through all the prophets. He interprets everything from the point of view of Jesus. Scripture is seen through the prism of Jesus. >>Their hearts burn with the revelation.

They near Emmaus. "Stay with us," they say to this stranger. "Stay with us because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." We invite you to be one of us this evening, this night. A supreme act of hospitality toward someone they just met. My guess is that it is their home. This man and, probably, this woman invite this stranger to their home. "Stay with us." Abide with us.

And then they are at table. Suddenly, there is a dramatic reversal. Roles are switched. The hosts become the guests. The guest, this stranger, becomes the host. Customarily it is the invited one who is served. But not this time. In the classic formula of Holy Communion, this stranger takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it. It is Jesus who serves, it is Jesus who is the servant. It is not just a meal. It is the Lord's Supper. The first one after the Resurrection.

What happens to these two people whom Jesus serves? What happens to them as Jesus comes into their lives as the Risen Christ? What happens to us as we fill their anonymity? Their hearts are opened. They recognize Him. This is not like Mary Magdalene or Thomas. The two people of Emmaus recognize the Risen Lord not because they have heard his voice, not because they have seen him and his wounds. They recognize him in a different way. They recognize him through the witness of Scripture, Word of God, and through the Holy Sacraments. They experience the self-revelation of the Risen Christ in the Word and in the bread. And they take both into their lives.

Yes, it is true. Some, a few, in the first generation of Christians – like Mary Magdalene and Thomas – heard and saw and then believed in the Risen Christ. But most other have come to full faith in another way. They heard the Word. They shared the Lord's table. They came to believe through Scripture and Sacrament. That is the way we believe. And that is what binds us to those first believers – what binds us to those two people on the road to Emmaus.

The stranger *appeared* to them out of nowhere. They invited the stranger into their lives, and to their table. How is the Risen Christ known to generations to come? We do not need to hear his voice. We do not need to see him or his wounds.

He is known to us in the sharing of the Word, and in the sharing of the bread.

Each Sunday we celebrate a Little Easter. But at each Eucharist, whether it is on Sunday or another day of the week – at each Eucharist we follow the form that comes to us as our Lord made his presence known to the two people walking to Emmaus – two people at the end of day trying to make sense of life and death – and faith. We follow that form that comes to us – the Liturgy of the Word, and the Liturgy of the Table – we follow it right here this morning.

Our worship reflects what happened on that road and in that house on that first Easter. At each Eucharist, the Risen Christ comes to us, as he did to them, to open our eyes to his mystical presence and to leave our hearts burning for his love – to recognize him, to know his presence, even when we do not see him.

There is more than enough room in their anonymity for us to squeeze in. There is more than enough room as the Risen Lord leads us in Scripture study. There is more than enough room for us at His table as the bread is broken, as his body was broken, and given for us, and to us. ❀