

Third Sunday of Easter
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church
Houston, TX
26 April 2020

Luke 24:13-35

I once went to a small village on the mountains outside of Medellin, for a two-week mission, when I was a young seminarian in a Roman Catholic Seminary in Colombia. Life in this small area was as tough as you can imagine. Over 90% of the people lived in great poverty, and two families controlled all the farms, commerce, and most of the housing in the area. You either worked for one or the other family, or you tried to make it on your own, which was even harder to do. I remember visiting many of the villagers, and after a while I began to see a familiar scene. In house after house, there were posters of American rock bands like Chicago, or American stars like Scott Baio, who was extremely popular then. I pointed to an old poster of Elvis once and asked a young man of about 14 why he liked Elvis. He responded, "I don't know that man and I can't even understand what he sings about. But, when I look at his picture I am reminded that the world is bigger than this village. And that gives me hope."

The passage today is all about hope. The two disciples going back home after witnessing the passion and crucifixion of Jesus are feeling as hopeless as anyone can feel. Their world has been turned upside down. As they leave Jerusalem they remember the excitement and the joy they experienced with Jesus of Nazareth. He was a great prophet who was able to do great miracles and signs. He was charming and funny. He was as smart as they come. He had a passion for history and was able to interpret the nation's past in a unique way. He was charismatic and extremely personable. When he spoke to you and looked you in the eye you always felt as though he was seeing directly into your soul. He was authentic and filled with a kind of love they had never seen before. When they were with Jesus they felt loved, forgiven and accepted.

But he was dead now, and all that was left to do was to return home. Back to the hopeless existence of share-croppers, in a land owned by others and controlled by Rome. They had hoped that Jesus was the one spoken about in the Holy Scriptures. They had hoped he would redeem Israel from the oppressive Romans, and restore the nation to its promised glory. But now Jesus is dead, and there is nothing they can do about it. All they can do is go back home, and accept that the way things are is the way they will always be. They had heard that some had seen Jesus alive, but they had their doubts. Most likely the body was just stolen, and the women and others were making too much of the empty tomb. People are always looking for hope in the wrong places. Certainly, this was one of those cases.

At some point during this conversation, Jesus appears to them, but they can not recognize him. There is something familiar in the stranger, but they can not figure out what it is. He begins to walk with them and to listen to their story, but they do not recognize him until much later on. I have always wondered why they couldn't recognize Jesus. Holy Scripture does not tell us that Jesus' voice changed in any way as the result of his death. Did he sound differently after the resurrection? Wouldn't they have

recognized his voice, his accent, his particular way of speaking? Could it be that they had such a preconceived idea of Jesus that they could no longer recognize him in their midst? Could it be that their own hopelessness and sorrow got in the way of seeing Jesus walking alongside?

I can hardly blame them. They had prayed and hoped for a redeemed Israel and yet all they saw around them was an un-redeemed world. Their best hopes for a new life were crucified with Jesus of Nazareth. How can there be any reason for hope left in their world. My friends, many of us are very familiar with these emotions. Many of us have been oppressed by hopelessness, and this hopelessness challenges our faith every day. Hope is in short supply as this pandemic continues to advance around the globe. Hope is in short supply as millions have lost their jobs and retirements during this troubled economy. Hope is in short supply as many around the globe continue to struggle with serious poverty. Even today it is very difficult to recognize the Lord.

The Emmaus Disciples had the Scriptures, which pointed to the Messiah, but they could not understand them. It never occurred to them that the death of the Messiah was necessary for the redemption of Israel to take place. Jesus today opens the Scriptures to them, and leads them to a proper understanding. We too have our Holy Scriptures, and they tell us that Jesus is alive, and that he is in our midst. But still we have a hard time seeing him in our world.

A famous Lutheran pastor puts it this way, "In the midst of our grieving and hopelessness -- or of our wealth and prosperity, it can still be difficult to recognize the risen Jesus in our midst. It can still be difficult to find the proper understanding of scriptures. But Jesus doesn't give up on disciples who are 'foolish and slow of heart to believe' (v. 25)."

The good news, my friends is that Jesus breaks into our world and changes us from the inside out. Last week we saw him breaking into the Apostle's world by showing up in a locked room. Today he shows up as other disciples are walking home. He is not repelled by our doubts or by our faithlessness. Just the opposite, he will continue to break into our life to open our eyes, to open our hearts, and to open our minds. It is through his intervention in our lives that a proper interpretation of Holy Scripture is even possible. It is only through his love and his grace that we can see his face reflected in the face of our brothers and sisters.

The good news is that he lives and he walks among us. We are not alone in this lonely planet. We have not been forgotten by God. Today, I invite you to have courage. He lives, and he is among us, even if we can not recognize him at times. The great comfort for us today is that Jesus doesn't give up on us, even though at times we are foolish and slow to believe. He is still in the eyes opening business. If we let him, he will open our hearts and minds as well, so that we may see him in our lives and in the lives of our families, churches, and communities. May he continue to bless you. Amen!