

A Post-Easter Hike

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

April 30, 2017 -- 3rd of Easter

Acts 2:14a, 36-41 (NRSV) But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." {37} Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" {38} Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. {39} For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." {40} And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." {41} So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

1 Peter 1:17-23 (NRSV) If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. {18} You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, {19} but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. {20} He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. {21} Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God. {22} Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. {23} You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

Luke 24:13-35 (NRSV) Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, {14} and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. {15} While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, {16} but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. {17} And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. {18} Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" {19} He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, {20} and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. {21} But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. {22} Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, {23} and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. {24} Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." {25} Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! {26} Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" {27} Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. {28} As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. {29} But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. {30} When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. {31} Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. {32} They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" {33} That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. {34} They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" {35} Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Do you like to hike? Or was there ever a time in your life that you liked to hike? For some there's nothing better than finding that trail and seeing what's out there. For others if the trail description says anything over, say, 3/10ths of a mile it's way too far. Trails that lead to things like waterfalls or reportedly spectacular vistas are a dream to some people. Other people wait at the beginning of the trail to see how tired people are who are returning and to ask them, 'is it worth the hike?' Some people consult their smartphones to see what time sunset is to know when they need to be back from a hiking foray into the wilderness. Other people say, 'whoa, that's far enough' when they lose their cell phone signal. Some people don't give much thought to things like how steep a hill is along the trail. Other people, wisely, calculate whether going or coming back is mostly up or down hill. They know that what seems to be an easy downhill stroll on the way becomes a grueling challenge on the way back. Of course which ever kind of hiker you are most of the hiking described is recreational. Well, some people consider it recreational. Some consider it to be good exercise. Others consider it something to be endured in order to preserve the domestic tranquility.

We know, if we peruse the pages of the Bible, a task some people do as a joy and others do only when necessary, that it is all pre-vehicle save for a donkey or two, maybe some chariots, and the ships Jonah and later Paul sailed on to get to place where they, like almost everybody in the Bible,

walked to get where they were going. Walked as in how to get there. Walked as in the obligatory means of getting from here to there. Walked. Not hiked. The only possible stroll in the bible was when Adam and Eve walked with God in the cool of the evening. If you consider what happened they must not have enjoyed it all that much.

Susan and I have just returned from our post-Easter getaway. Thanks, by the way, for being here last week to hear Chaplain Solomon share a wonderful sermon. In order to get where we were going we flew and rented a car. Not much of our post-Easter walking was by necessity. It was by far mostly hiking. And in visiting a state like Arizona there was more hiking than I usually plan on doing in my post-EASTER periods of rest, relaxation and recuperation from the rigors of Lent, Holy Week, and Easter in the life of the church. We walked a lot. Including a couple of those uphill on the way back assessments of cardio vascular fitness. But we walked, hiked, because we wanted to do so.

Today we have a classic story of a post-Easter experience of a couple of Jesus' lesser known followers. These two, after the rigors of months on the road walking along with Jesus are walking back home. A seven mile walk, not because they want to, not a hike they want to make, a walk and what for them must have felt like the most confusing day of their living. A long walk on a perplexing day. On Easter Sunday afternoon. At least as Luke tells the story.

One of the most endearing post resurrection stories is called the road to Emmaus. It's endearing because we know about that road. We've been on it in the past. Some of us are on it right now. It's a road traveled out of a sense of needing to be somewhere, but of being restless and unsure of the most recent events of our living. It's a road on which we are met by our doubts and fears, but also by the very answers of our living. If we are willing to listen.

We're not sure who they are. Cleopas, unless he is dually named, isn't in the usual roll of the 12. We know they are followers. And it seems that they're from Emmaus. Who knows? And who knows why, in light of the news from earlier in the day they are traveling at all. We don't know why they are on the way to Emmaus, except for the fact that no one among Jesus' followers seems to think it's safe in Jerusalem.

And most mysterious of all, we don't know, save for the powerful effect Luke has in store at the end of this story, why they didn't recognize Jesus. That does present questions, lots of questions perhaps. Why didn't they know him? Maybe because they are not in familiar environs, or in a context in which they knew him. Maybe it was their mix of grief, hope and wonder. We just don't know and for Luke it isn't even important – until the end of the story.

Then Luke shows us what's important. Being good travelers and showing typical hospitality of the day, these two, when they get where they are going, maybe their home, maybe the local Holiday Inn, say to Jesus, what

most of us who have been on journeys with him want to say, “stay with us.” We want this person, who has spoken to us in a way that makes us feel like he has known everything we have ever known...to stay with us. We want the comfort only he can offer us. We want the feeling to last forever. We want someone who has the answers to our questions to be with us.

And somewhere in Emmaus, this one who for whatever reason is not familiar, is offered bread to bless and as he does something that is so intimately familiar to them...breaks and blesses that bread... their eyes are opened and their hearts burn within them. And he vanishes from their sight. You have to think that their seven mile hike on the way that was so difficult and heavy and uphill in its sorrow and confusion is all downhill as with renewed life and hope and excitement in recognizing Jesus, that very hour, they hit the road again and hurry back to Jerusalem to share that good news with the others.

How many journeys of faith start with a bit of bread served on a table of grace? How many of us came to know Jesus at a table... as we sat as a family breaking bread...from biscuits to muffins to wonder bread? Bread was broken and in ways said and unsaid we were invited on a journey of faith. “God is great, God is good let us thank him for our food.” “Come Lord Jesus be our guest and let these gifts to us be blessed.” “Give us, this day, our daily bread.” Blessings at a meal are purposeful in thanking God for what is

before us, but also introducing each succeeding generation to one to whom we would say, 'stay with us.'

Why is it important to share words of scripture and faith? Why are prayers said, not just in thanks for daily bread, but for the ills of the world, the needs of friends and family and the earnest prayers for the work of the church so important? It is in the doing, the saying, the praying that we bring Jesus into our living.

We who know the Easter story because we, like these two on the road, have heard it witnessed to us by others. We, who like these two on the road, waver between great hope and high expectation and doubt, confusion and despair. We, who like these two on the road, need desperately to hear what this one has to say to us, this one who comes to us and may not be recognized, this one who reveals himself in the simplest of actions.

This one, who when encountered, makes our hearts burn within us. Do you realize that's why the sacrament is so important? That bread breaking moment. Do you know it's why, in the church, our church, fellowship is so important?

It's because we, you, me, all of us are on a post-Easter hike, a post-Easter walk of faith that has ups and downs. That sometimes is a stroll in the garden in the cool of the evening and at other times feels like the last mile of a marathon. That sometimes is filled with wonder and other times is fraught

with peril. It is why, along the way of this journey we travel together, there are tables with loaves prepared to be prayed over, blessed and broken so that the wonder of something so special happens that it communicates the very presence of God. At the Lord's table, at the fellowship table, at the LOGOS table, at the breakfast table, we come to understand, our eyes are opened to the truth of who and what we can be. Because of bread prayerfully and carefully broken and a cup fearfully and wonderfully shared...we and so many others have our eyes opened and a Lord revealed.....

And just as it began. Here we are...still on a journey....all at different places...all with different needs...but along the way we find Jesus, our risen Lord, walking with us, talking with us and if we dare do so, if we dare ask, 'stay with us?' He will come and dine with us and in the breaking of bread we will know him, and be nourished and given new life...