

**“Missing Easter”**  
A Sermon for Every Sunday, Easter 3A  
*Luke 24:13-35*

I.

In some ways it is hard to believe it was Easter only three Sundays ago. For most of us, Easter is a distant memory by this point. We have made it through all the ham leftovers or just given up, family has gone home, and the long weekend, we found, was not long enough. Our lives have gone back to normal. And the resurrection seems like something that we talked about for an hour or so and then we were back to our regular programming. Which seems sad...but mostly normal.

What may seem stranger to us, really, is the ancient Christian practice of celebrating Eastertide for fifty days, from Easter Sunday all the way until Pentecost. Fifty days seems like an awfully long time to try to keep the party going.

And yet, I think the Christian calendar is on to something. Because sometimes....we *miss* Easter. Or only just catch a glimpse of it before it's gone. We need more time to digest what has happened. We need more time to let it all sink in.

II.

We aren't the only ones. For most of the disciples, Easter barely happened. No one witnessed the resurrection. And there are only seven stories of Jesus appearing to his disciples afterwards in all four of the gospels. So while the crucifixion seems painfully real, the resurrection takes on a sort of dream-like quality in Scripture. We catch glimpses of Jesus as he

shows up and then disappears. And most of the people who encounter him are not quite sure who they are talking to...at least at first.

In John and even more so in the Gospel of Luke, which we read from today, the people who meet Jesus after the resurrection have an incredibly hard time recognizing him. Mary at the tomb talks with him, but mistakes him for a gardener. Thomas hears about him third-hand but finds the stories impossible to trust. And the two followers of Jesus that we meet on this road to Emmaus have a lengthy conversation with the risen Lord, even inviting him to stop with them for dinner, and have no idea who they are talking to.

III.

We meet Cleopas and his friend in our reading today as they are walking down the road, leaving Jerusalem and making their way on to a town called Emmaus. Archaeologists aren't quite sure where Emmaus was located. But perhaps geography isn't all that important. Because even if we have never visited the same town on the map, we have certainly all walked down that road. This is the road of disappointment and broken dreams. This is the road of regrets and questions and uncertain futures.

Cleopas and his companion talked with one another: Could it really have only been a week since they had stood with the crowds along the street, waving palms and cheering? It had seemed like finally the whole world was beginning to recognize what they had already known to be true. That Jesus was the true king. The one who would fix everything.

But instead, only a few days later, they had watched from their hiding places as Jesus was nailed to a cross, executed by the state, near the city dump. What kind of king was that? What

kind of messiah? They must have been wrong. He had been an inspiring preacher, an insightful teacher, a friend. But he must not have been the one they had been waiting for after all.

As they talk to each other about these things, a stranger appears beside them. Clearly eavesdropping, he finally asks what Cleopas and his friend are talking about with all their heavy sighs and hushed whispers. Looking at each other a bit shocked, they tell him the story. The story about how they had hoped Jesus was the one. But how they must have been mistaken.

Sure, they'd heard the rumors that his tomb had been found empty. That an angel had appeared and said he was alive. But they hadn't seen it for themselves. And could you really trust a woman? Even the courts wouldn't accept their testimony! They were notoriously unreliable witnesses. Wasn't it more likely that this unbelievable story was just that...unbelievable?

IV.

But then the stranger does a most remarkable thing. He begins telling the story of Jesus back to Cleopas and his friend. But this time the story starts at the very beginning of Scripture and continues through prophets and proverbs. And as they listen to the stranger's words, those defeated disciples feel a spark being kindled in their hearts. It begins to warm them all the way through, tingling down to their fingers and setting their hair on end. It feels strange. Like something they hadn't felt in ages. Something a little bit like hope.

They don't want to let the feeling go. So as they draw near to their destination, Cleopas and his friend invite the stranger to come and eat with them. But when they sit down at the table, all of a sudden the stranger becomes the host. He picks up the bread as if he made it himself. He blesses it. He breaks it. And he begins to share it. As if it was his table and his meal. And as

they reach out to receive the bread, Cleopas and his companion finally see the stranger clearly for who he truly was.

V.

Before my grandmother had a stroke she would talk to a brick wall if it would sit still to listen. We often laughed, having each had the experience of sitting in the living room while she was vacuuming and realizing, when she cut the vacuum off that she had been talking to us the whole time, though no one could hear her over the machine and though she had been in a completely different room. She never met a stranger and she had people drop by and stay for dinner with no warning just to get close to her pound cake and her stories. She never minded. She welcomed anyone who came by and made sure they went back for seconds.

After she had her stroke, my grandmother could understand everything that people were saying to her. She could laugh at jokes and keep up with the stories. But, on most days, she could only say four words. Come on Here. And: Well.

You would think that we wouldn't have been able to recognize her without all those words. It was as if a core part of who she was had been taken away from us. But somehow she managed, with just four words, to make sure we knew what she wanted. She could tell us she disagreed with whatever we were saying: "Well." She could tell us she was excited about the possibility of something: "Well, come on here!" And, maybe most importantly, she could tell us to go back for seconds: "Come on here" she would say, gesturing towards our plates and pushing us towards the kitchen.

The stroke changed our relationship with my grandmother. We weren't able to ask her opinion and conversations became increasingly one-sided. But there were certain things that had been true about my grandmother for so long, that even the loss of language could not rob her of

them. Her hospitality. Her sense of humor. Her engagement with the world. Even with only four words, she was able to still hold onto the truly important things that made her who she was.

In the same way, we are reminded in today's scripture that after the resurrection, the disciples' relationship with Jesus changed. He wasn't as easily recognized. He wasn't as easily found, perhaps. But the things that made him recognizable to them were the things that had always been true about who he was. The opening of scripture, the breaking of bread, the hospitality shown to the stranger.

## VII.

And I have to think: maybe this is how Jesus always shows up. Even today. In the midst of our ordinary lives when we are walking towards home or getting ready for supper. In the faces of neighbors or strangers we meet along the way. When we read the Bible and discuss it together. When we share a meal. When we invite someone to join us in fellowship.

After all: Easter doesn't happen one Sunday and then disappear. And Jesus wasn't just alive thousands of years ago, never having been heard from since. No, resurrection is something that happens every day. In relationships that break and then are mended. In hopes that seem to shatter and then are slowly reborn. In lives that fall apart but get put back together piece by piece.

If we want to experience Jesus—if we want to celebrate Easter—we don't need to position ourselves in exactly the right place at exactly the right time. No, we simply need to pay attention. For the risen Lord is among us. Moving and speaking and working here and now.

And even when we find it hard to recognize him. Even when we realize we have gotten it all wrong and missed the whole point, Jesus keeps walking beside us, meeting us on whatever

road we are on. He asks us what we are thinking about, and then begins to retell our story back to us with a whole new ending. He sets our hearts on fire within us with a hope that we thought we had lost forever. And all of a sudden we realize: Jesus has been with us all along.

Amen.

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