

A Easter 3 4.23.23

Luke 24:13-35

Focus Statement: Jesus meets us where we are and walks with us on the way.

When the bishop informed me of the leave I took earlier in the year, his first recommendation was that I needed to go somewhere for a few days to decompress and get used to the idea of being off. So, I went to Sara's. Some of you may remember Sara, her and her husband have been here couple times, they have a bunch of little blonde-haired kids. The first morning I was there was a Friday, and I woke up with the kids. Not, I should add, because the kids were loud, but because the kids woke up the cats, who were locked in the room next to me, and the cats were loud. But anyway, I woke up with the kids and hung out with them while they were getting ready for school. Once they were on the school bus, Sara went upstairs to her home office, and I sat on the couch. I intended to read for a bit and then go for a run. Instead, I slept on their couch... for four hours. Sara's husband is a school bus driver and came home during my nap. I found out later he was very concerned I hadn't slept well the night before, since I was passed out on their couch at eight in the morning. But Sara assured him, no, she came here to sleep. She just needs to sleep.

That Sara moved to Wisconsin around the same time I moved to Michigan has always been a great gift for me, because for years Sara's house, wherever it was, has been the place I've retreated to when I just needed to get away for a bit. I met Sara when we both lived in DC, and on internship, I used to drive down from Syracuse for a long weekend, just to sleep on Sara's couch for a night and be with people and in a place that was safe and familiar. I was thinking about Sara's house this week, and the role it has played in my life, when I was reading about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Like last week's Gospel reading, today's finds us "on the same day" of Jesus' resurrection. Last week's story told of the disciples locked in an upper room in fear. Today's is of two disciples getting out of town to go to Emmaus. Why Emmaus? Or where even is Emmaus? Our text tells us it's seven miles from Jerusalem, other manuscripts say twenty miles. The point, like much of Luke's attempts to locate us geographically, is more theological than it is a place on a map. Theologian Frederick Buechner has a definition for Emmaus that I think really captures it. Buechner wrote, Emmaus is "the place we go in order to escape—a bar, a movie, wherever it is we throw up our hands and say, 'Let the whole damned thing go to hang. It makes no difference anyway.' Emmaus may be buying a new suit or a new car or more cigarettes than you really want, or reading a second-rate novel or even writing one. Emmaus may be going to church on Sunday. Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the whole holds nothing sacred: that even the wisest and bravest and loveliest decay and die; that even the noblest ideas that men have—ideas about love and freedom and justice—have always in time been twisted out of shape by selfish men for selfish ends."

Emmaus was for the disciples what Sara's house is for me, it was the place they were going because they just couldn't stay in Jerusalem any longer. Hopefully for the disciple's sake, Emmaus was, like friends who love you, a healthy and good escape, and not any of the number of unhealthy coping mechanisms we can certainly all think of, and if we're honest have probably deployed in our lives at one point or another. But, healthy or unhealthy, Emmaus was a getaway. It was everything the disciples had hoped for, longed for, believed

in, had just come crashing down around them. And they needed space and time and distance to gather themselves, lick their wounds, and figure out how life would, or would not, go on.

And here's where this story gets powerful. The disciples were on the road to Emmaus when suddenly they noticed another person traveling with them, and they struck up a conversation with him. There's nothing weird about this. I discussed the weather waiting in line for McDonalds at an Illinois rest stop on the way to Sara's. And how many cliches are around people drowning their sorrows at a local bar and chatting it up with the bartender. You can meet a traveler along the way whether Emmaus is a good destination or a poor one. The point is, they met this traveler and he began to journey with them. The traveler asked them what they were discussing, and they began to tell him about Jesus. Which is hilarious irony because of course we the reader know what they don't, the traveler is Jesus. Cleopas said, "are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place" to literally the only person not just in Jerusalem but in all of everything who truly knew all that had taken place.

Then they got to where they were going, and the traveler—who is Jesus--moved to continue on, but the disciples, still thinking he's a random traveler, urged him to stay with them. So he stayed, and "when he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight." Guys, here's what's so beautiful and powerful and hopeful about what happened to these disciples, what it means for us. The disciples were retreating from

all the pain and hurt they'd experienced, when Christ met them on the road and traveled with them. And even though they had no idea who he was, Christ just walked alongside them, journeying with them, teaching them, and "interpreting to them the things about himself." Their lack of recognition and understanding did not stop Jesus from just hanging out, walking along with them on the road. And then, when they got to Emmaus, it was around a table, in fellowship and community, that "their eyes were opened and they recognized him."

Dear people of God, Jesus meets us where we are, even if where we are is running away from wherever we've been, and then just hangs out with us determinedly until we recognize him. In this story it only took a few hours, last week it took a week with Thomas, sometimes it takes even longer, but Jesus is a patient fellow. And I think it's key too that Jesus met them on the way to Emmaus, and not once they were there. Jesus met them and went with them. Maybe Emmaus was a super healthy place to go, like my friend Sara's, maybe it was compulsive internet shopping, I don't know, the text doesn't tell us. But the point is Jesus met them on the way and went with them. He wasn't turned off or turned around by their lack of familiarity, he just went.

And, and, it was in community, it was in fellowship, it was in a meal, that their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Dear people of God, this, like the Thomas story last week, is Jesus breaking the fourth wall for us and showing us where we too can encounter Jesus. In fellowship and community. This is a Eucharist story, yes, bread is broken in the story, we will break bread around this table in a few minutes, and you will encounter the risen Christ.

But it is also a promise that we meet Christ in all sorts of broken bread and table fellowship. In coffee hour and leftover funeral cake. In Roadrunners lunches. In Freeze pops. In car rides and Facebook messages and text chats and conversation. Around this table, and the coffee table, and the lounge table, and our kitchen tables, and every other place where the people of God gather in support and care for each other, those are the places where Christ meets us.

And what about the vanishing part? Guys, that's also super cool. Because here's the thing about Luke's Gospel. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is always out just ahead of the disciples, urging them forward to the next location. When the crowd gathered around him in Nazareth, he passed through the midst of them. When those he'd healed begged him to stay, he had to go on to other towns and villages. And when the disciples finally recognized him at the table, he vanished so that they could return to Jerusalem and tell the others all that they had seen and heard. This passage offers us a God who is both with us when we are in need and also always just ahead of us, urging us on to where we need to go. A God who is both very present and just out of reach, just a little bit more than we thought we could be, calling us to love just that little bit more, to know ourselves to be just that little bit stronger.

Dear people of God, the road to Emmaus promises us a Jesus who is with us, even when we cannot see him, and is also out ahead of us, urging us forward. Wherever you are today. Whatever hurt or pain or grief you carry, there is God. And whoever you could be. That potential inside you that you don't even know yet, God is there too, calling you forward into

a yet unknown future that is greater and stronger than you can even imagine. Wherever you are, and wherever you will be. There too, already, is Jesus. Amen.