

Sermon: Easter 3 (A)

St. Peter's, Norfolk

Text: Luke 24:13-35

Date: April 26, 2020

Karl Barth, one of the twentieth century's most famous theologians, was on a streetcar one day in Basel, Switzerland where he lived and lectured. A tourist to the city climbed aboard the streetcar and sat down next to Barth. The two men started chatting with each other.

"Are you new to the city?" Barth inquired.

"Yes," said the tourist.

"Is there anything you would particularly like to see in this city?" asked Barth.

"Yes," he said. ***"I'd love to meet the famous theologian Karl Barth. Do you know him?"***

Barth replied with a smile, ***"Well as a matter of fact I do. I give him a shave every morning."*** A few blocks later, the tourist got off the streetcar quite happy. He went back to his hotel, saying to himself, ***"What a treat, I met Karl Barth's barber today."***

That story amuses me. That tourist was in the presence of the very person he most wanted to meet, but even with the most obvious clue, he never realized that the man with whom he was talking was the great man himself.

It reminds me too of Mary's reaction on Easter morning. In her grief, she thought the man she was talking to was the gardener. It wasn't, of course. Until he called her name she did not realize she was speaking to the risen Jesus.

And, of course, it reminds me of that scene on the road to Emmaus I read a few moments ago, when later that same Easter day, two of the disciples walked for a while with the resurrected Jesus, and they had no idea with whom they were talking.

In much the same way a lot of people have trouble sensing God's presence in the world and in their lives. It's not so much a case of **"Is there a God?"** or **"Does God exist?"** It's more like, **"If there is a God why can't I see Him more clearly? If God is all powerful, shouldn't I at least feel a rumble or some vibrations from time to time- something to give me some proof that He is out there? And if God is out there, why isn't He able to break through to me- an ordinary person?"**

Our reading for today, taken from the 24th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, tells of two of the disciples walking the seven miles from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. These two men were no doubt struggling to understand the meaning of the events that had taken place over the past week. In the short space of seven days, their world had been shattered. Jesus, on whom they had placed all their hopes and dreams, had been crucified and was dead. The very light of their world had been snuffed out.

Earlier that day, some women had gone to the tomb and discovered that Jesus' body was missing. Some angels were there who told them that Jesus was alive! How could he be? What in the world was going on? What did it all mean?

As they walked along talking, a stranger joined them. He wanted to know what they were discussing. They were amazed that he hadn't heard about Jesus' crucifixion. One of them, Cleopas, asked the stranger, **"Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem? Don't you know the things that have happened there these past few days?"** So they began to tell him all about it.

They told him about Jesus, and how they had hoped He would be the one to deliver Israel from Roman rule- but he was crucified and is

dead. When they reached Emmaus, the disciples invited the man to have supper with them.

Have you ever wondered why the disciples couldn't recognize Jesus even while he was walking with them? Was he wearing a disguise of some kind? Was it because the late afternoon sun was glaring in their eyes? Had they never stood this close to him before?

Well, Luke tells us the answer- it's because a supernatural force was at work. God was at work. Luke tells us: "***They were kept from recognizing him.***" (NIV) Another translation reads, "***Their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.***" Yet another translation reads, "***Their eyes were restrained.***" The implication is that someone (in this case God) did not allow them to recognize Jesus. These two travelers were in the very presence of Jesus- but didn't realize it.

It's like that sometimes- isn't it? Sometimes God is at work in our lives, sometimes He's walking right beside us.... and we don't recognize Him.

It was like that for me for the five year period before I went off to study at seminary. I was an elementary school teacher then. I had no idea at that time that I would someday be a priest in the church. In fact, I didn't even have a church I could call home. But like a whirlwind, things began to happen in my life and I was meeting people and certain events were taking place (all of which seemed confusing to me, then) but all of which served in preparing me for what I would be doing for the rest of my life- parish ministry.

You have probably had some similar experiences. Times when you could look back and say, "***Ah...that's was God doing that!***" As I look back at those times, I can see now that Jesus was walking with me; but just like those two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, I just didn't recognize Him in all the confusion.

Luke tells us that the two travelers were **"downcast."** Remember what the disciples said, **"We had hoped that he (Jesus) was the one who was going to redeem Israel."**

"We had hoped....." Boy, you could write a thousand stories around those three words, couldn't you? **"We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. We had hoped that he was the promised Messiah. We had hoped that he was going to deliver our nation from the oppression of Roman rule..."**

Maybe you have had some hopes that have been shattered. Maybe some of your deepest dreams have turned into nightmares. Perhaps your marriage has been shattered, even though you had *great hope* on the day you said **"till death do us part."** Perhaps you've had some other relationship come to an end....or perhaps you had great hopes for your retirement and then that diagnosis came....and shattered your plans.

Maybe you showed up for work one seemingly ordinary day, but found out it would be your last because you've been down-sized and you went home without a job and your hopes dashed. Maybe your adult children haven't embraced your faith in Jesus. **"We had hoped...."**

I think hope is like a light bulb. Hope is bright and promising...full of potential. But it's also very fragile. Drop a light bulb and it probably will shatter. When something unexpected happens in life, hope can be shattered- like it was for these two travelers on the road. Their hope had been shattered.

So, here's what Jesus said to them, **"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"**-that doesn't sound very pastoral, does it? He continued, **"Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"** And then

Luke says, "...*that beginning with Moses and the prophets, Jesus explained to them what was said in the Scriptures concerning himself.*" (Repeat)

What an experience that must have been! Talk about a Bible study! A study with Jesus about Jesus! Wouldn't you have loved to have been there and heard that one!

Later, at supper, when Jesus was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus. Luke says that "...*their eyes were opened.*" Did you catch that? "*Then their eyes were opened.*" The same supernatural force that prevented them from recognizing Jesus now opened their eyes to who this man really was. God opened their eyes- then they knew Jesus! "*He is alive! It's just as the angels had said. It's just as the women said. Jesus is alive!*"

Has God done that for you? Has God allowed you to get a glimpse of Jesus- to see who He really is? It can be quite powerful when it happens. In fact, it can change your life! It certainly changed the lives of those two disciples. God opened their eyes when Jesus broke the bread.

And do you know what? He does the same thing today for those who seek him. It may be at the Communion rail, it may be through some incident or some circumstance (like a pandemic?) or some specific event or even through another person. Or it could be in a worship service or while you are praying or reading the Bible- heck it could be any time.

God is opening the eyes of people every day- to recognize Jesus and who He is, and to recognize the new life he gives us.

My dear friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, if the road of your life is taking you somewhere other than where you had hoped to go, then put your trust in God....put your trust in Jesus. He can turn things around. And if you allow him to do it, He'll put you back on the road of possibilities....the road of victory.... the road of hope. Allow God to open your eyes- allow him to show you Jesus....He wants to do it, and He will do it. Amen.