

## **Opening Our Eyes**

Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19

Luke 24: 13-35

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### **Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19**

I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.

Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish.

Then I called on the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I pray, save my life!"

What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord,

I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.

O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds.

I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord.

I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people,

in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!

### **Luke 24: 13-35**

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 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?" 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, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 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. Moreover, some women of our group

astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 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. 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." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 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. 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. 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?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

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Like many other people these days, I do a lot of walking around the neighborhood. It’s partly for exercise, partly to clear the cobwebs in my brains when I’ve been working for awhile or paying too much attention to the news. Part of the trip is for the scenery, for the small, beautiful, peaceful brooks I pass, to watch the squirrels and chipmunks run freely and unaware of the world around them, and to see spring beginning to bloom despite the persistent little snowfalls. Physically I don’t travel that far. Two trips around the block or up and around the schools on Hillcat Dr is just a mile. Just a few laps around so that I am staying safe at home.

On some of these walks I am alone, and other times I have family members with me, as they too clear the fuzzy brain cobwebs and stretch their legs. Most of the conversation on these walks is about all that is happening these days. We talk about the anxiety-producing, and heart-breaking stories world-wide of lives torn apart by the lethal microscopic virus, or the risks that essential employees make, including my niece who is a nurse so had her 2-year-old son stay with relatives, so she could work and not risk infecting him. We talk about friends in Cambridge who are recovering from Covid-19 as they were exposed through his work as a chaplain at a VA hospital. We talk about missing family and friends, and about reassuring my 4-year-old grandson that yes, his friends and teachers miss him just as much as he misses them. We talk about how incredible and still inconceivable it is that we no longer gather in the sanctuary for worship, and that our 3-season porch has become the physical place from where we all gather in spirit to worship from the heart.

We talk about the absurdity of this time, joke about the odd products still unwanted on the store shelves, laugh at the bartering value of toilet paper, and grimace at needing to remember to keep our masks and hand sanitizer with us just to get a gallon of milk. We talk about missing our routines, going to restaurants, shopping, sports, going on day trips and wonder what plans for the rest of the year will change or be cancelled. We know that in the midst of all that is happening we are lamenting over ‘champagne problems,’ but they are still important to us, and are the new lifestyle for many people.

We also talk about the incredible and unexpected things that have emerged from this dark night of the world as coyotes wander the Golden Gate Bridge, as dolphins swim in Italian ports, as the Venice Canal is clean and clear, and worldwide pollution levels have dropped. These are silver linings in the grim cloud as Mother Earth reminds us that we are her guests on this planet, and not the masters of it. We talk about boundless generosity that fills food banks, families visiting loved ones through nursing home windows, the creative gifts of homemade, handcrafted face masks, the city of London housing the homeless in hotels, distilleries shifting to making hand sanitizer and giving it away, and musicians sharing their talents in a benefit concert. We talk about finding hope and encouragement in these stories that are beacons of light in this night.

As we walk and talk about all that is happening, we walk the same spiritual path that Cleopas and his companion, presumably his wife, walked as they traveled a long road from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus on that first Easter. As they talked about the sad and perplexing events of Holy Week and now the surprising discovery of the empty tomb and all that

that could possibly mean, Jesus came near to them and joined in their conversation. They did not recognize him as they shared with him the strange current events. Those who had gone to the tomb did not see Jesus. Now the two people who spoke with Jesus also did not see him. The unrecognized Jesus walked with them as a compassionate friend, listening to their cares, confusion and their sorrow. Jesus began to reveal himself to them through the Scriptures. They listened closely, but still did not know who walked alongside them. Still intrigued by his teachings, Cleopas and his companion extended gracious hospitality as the day was nearly over.

Biblical scholar Jan Lambrecht considers this act of hospitality the attitude by which Jesus was able to change them deeply. He says that, "By the offer of hospitality the Emmaus companions were able to transcend their self-concern, sadness, foolishness and slowness of heart, thus preparing them for the revelatory experience around the table where they were nourished."

It is at the dinner table where Jesus blessed and broke bread, that their eyes and hearts were suddenly open in recognition of him. And in that moment, Jesus vanished from their sight.

Yet in reality, Jesus was just a present as when he walked and talked with them, just as present when he compassionately listened to them. This is the literal and the spiritual journey they shared together, and it is the same journey that we share with Jesus. It is a companion journey we are reminded of every time we gather at the Communion table, bless and break bread in remembrance of Jesus. It is a companion journey we share with Jesus when we hear the voice, the words, the message of Jesus burning in our hearts.

On the walk we now take on this long road through the pandemic, how do we recognize that Jesus is traveling with us, listening to our cares, confusion and our sorrows?

It is not a physical recognition, as we have learned from the witnesses to the days following his resurrection who saw but could not see, but rather it is a heart encounter. It is those times when our hearts are burning within us.

In these days of a stay-at-home order, in the midst of death, suffering, and the fear of the unknown, the story of Cleopas and his companion who walked, talked, and broke bread with Jesus, shows us that the divine shows up in the seemingly small ways, that healing, and hope come in small, simple, transforming ways.

A walk on a long back road, a tender conversation, an invitation to stay. A bit of bread, a sip of wine, a welcoming dinner table, and Jesus is revealed and recognized.

And today? Jesus is revealed and recognized in the teddy bears and Easter eggs placed in our windows to bring happiness to stir-crazy children who are not out playing with friends, and the checking in with neighbors who are lonely and further isolated. He is revealed and recognized in the letters, cards, calls and Zoom visits with loved ones, the smiles exchanged with others underneath the masks while at the post office or grocery store, the waves across the street to neighbors as they walk by, the prayers and support we offer for essential workers on the frontlines, and the technology we learn so that we can gather and worship together while apart.

Jesus showed up once on a long, dusty road to Emmaus to be with Cleopas and his companion when they needed someone to listen, to journey with them in their grief and confusion, to be a compassionate friend. Jesus shows up on our long road through the Covid-19 pandemic as we need someone to listen to our fears, concerns and prayers, as we need someone faithful to journey with us, as we need a compassionate friend. Amen.

