

Second Sunday of EASTER, April 6 2008
Acts 2: 14, 36-41; Psalm 116: 1:1-3, 10-17, 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35
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Were not our hearts burning within us as he opened the scriptures to us on the Way.

This is perhaps one of the warmest lines of scripture. In it we can feel the excitement of these Apostles as they reflected on what happened to them as they listened to Jesus while they walked the roads.

On a literal level, we have two disciples leaving Jerusalem for the safety of Emmaus to get away from the Roman soldiers and anyone connected to the Temple police who may have been looking for the disciples of Jesus on the suspicion that they may have removed his body. A stranger catches up with them and asks them what's going on. In anger they snap back at him *Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?* When he inquires, *What things?* They reply, *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.* They could have left it there but they were also disappointed because they had expected Jesus to declare redemption of Israel, the freedom of Israel from the tyranny of Rome. They added; *But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.* And if that was not enough to suffer in one weekend, there were rumors that some women had *seen a vision of angels who said he was alive.* You can almost hear the doubt and exasperation in their voice as they spit this out at the stranger.

He takes it in his stride, and then, almost laughing at them for their failure to understand Scripture and begins to explain to them all that has happened as it was predicted by the prophets.

When they arrive in Emmaus they are so taken by this man that they invite him to their home, he accepts, somewhat reluctantly it seems, their invitation and then they recognize him it is in the breaking of the bread. They forget about supper and return in haste to Jerusalem where it was confirmed for them that the Lord had arisen and appeared, not to the women, but to Simon.

As we read this story we forget that this is not an eyewitness account by the local columnist reporting for The Jerusalem Herald. This is a story written some forty-five to fifty years later, over ten years after the Temple had been destroyed by Romans, and at about the beginning of the first persecution of Christians. With this context in mind we can revisit the story and ask ourselves what is this story telling us?

Ask a westerner of a certain age group a question about religion and you will more than likely be given a logically framed reasonable answer. Ask a Rabbi and she or he will reply, "Let me tell you a story." These are two different cultures at work and we tend to forget this when we read the scriptures.

As already stated, this is one of those stories that can be taken literally as it stands on its own. However, it can also be taken as a story that encapsulates the first year or years of the early church when it was known as The Way. Outside of Jerusalem and Galilee many people did not know

much about Jesus. Stories began to spread about him, some true, some exaggerated. Paul's preaching was primarily about Jesus, his death and resurrection and Paul had managed to begin to turn the teaching of Jesus within Judaism into a religion about a belief in the resurrected Jesus.

When people met and discussed Jesus they were likely to be asked "What's going on? What is this I hear about Jesus? What can you tell me about Jesus of Nazareth? Are the stories I am hearing about him true? What do you know about this new sect called The Way or Christian?"

In Paul's preaching there was no stories of a stone being rolled back; there were no stories of women going to the tomb and seeing or talking to angels. For Paul, Jesus appeared to him on the way to Damascus, Jesus appeared to other men. After reflecting on this mystical experience for some time, Paul began to preach and in his preaching he articulated a belief that Jesus "died for our sins"; that Jesus was the Savior of the World, the Messiah.

Some time later other writings began to appear and are attributed to Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, Thomas, Mary, Phillip etc. In these Gospel or "Good News" stories, they began to flesh out a bit more about the teaching and life of Jesus. These stories are theological reflections, not fairy tale stories, but theological reflections for a people used more to oral communication, not written books.

In oral communication a story carries a lot of information and it is easier remembered. Luke is writing to an official in Rome who also happens to be a lover of God (which could mean, a lover of the many Roman Gods) and who has learned about the God of the Jews and about Jesus who is

becoming known as the Son of God.

In this reflection, Luke is pointing out to Theophilus that Jesus is not some flash in the pan prophet, that this new sect is really not a new cult but rather it has roots that run deep in the recognized and respected religion of the Jews. For Luke, it is important to stress something to the effect, “don’t be silly, this Jesus whom you are talking about was expected as far back as Moses.”

The stranger in the story relates his own story to the disciples and assures them that all is okay, that everything that happened to Jesus was already predicted and what happened to him was foretold in the Scriptures. This was an assurance to Theophilus that what he was hearing about Jesus could be trusted and understood in the context of the Sacred Scriptures of the Jewish religion.

But it was not enough to recognize Jesus in the ancient prophecies. Jesus had to be recognized for who he was and what he did while he was alive for he had left a new commandment to love one another; he had made this commandment the center of his life through reaching out to those who differed from him; to those who were outcasts from society; to those who were leaders but who held different points of view than he did.

Paul told in his letter that he handed on what was handed to him, that on the night before he died, Jesus had shared a meal with his disciples and that at each gathering since, the disciples shared a meal in which they remembered the words of Jesus as a way of remembering his life and teachings.

The apostles in the story did not recognize the stranger. They were too busy recognizing what he was talking about. It excited them that someone was making sense out of their grief. They invited him in and it was in the breaking of bread that they recognized him.

By the time Luke wrote this story, stories of Jesus having been sited were numerous. Stories of Jesus breaking bread, stories of Jesus feeding thousands with just a couple of loaves and fish were being told. The point of the story being that God can do a lot with very little. The point being that Jesus is to be found in community, in sharing and in being hospitable. The point being that to be like Jesus is to be like the seed that died in the ground and became wheat that was crushed to become bread to become our nourishment.

Talking about Jesus is exciting. Talking about Jesus and remembering all that he said and did warms ones heart. Talking about Jesus and remembering him in the context of his final meal is not sadness but a loving memory, it is to start a fire in one's belly, it is to put one on fire to tell the story of his life; it is to put one on fire to tell others that Jesus is alive, that Jesus is with us in community and in the breaking of bread; that we will find him in opening ourselves up to the presence of God in one another.

Let us break bread together on our knees. Let us break bread together and recognize in one another the Christ of our Faith. Let us break bread together and work together with joy in our hearts to make the world the place Jesus wanted it to be so that the kingdom of God can be seen more and more as a reality of the love of God.