April 23, 2023 BREAKING BREAD

We are on the third Sunday after Easter and we are still meditating on the events that happened on the day that Jesus was resurrected. For this Sunday in the gospel reading St. Luke 24:13-31, we have another beautiful story of Resurrection Day. We read in verse 13, “That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.” “That very day” is of course Sunday, the first day of the week, the day Jesus rose from the dead. But at this point the two disciples, Cleopas and his companion, did not yet know what had happened to Jesus. They were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, although many New Testament scholars are of the view of not knowing the exact location of Emmaus.

On Easter Sunday, it’s almost certain in many churches the sermon is based on what happened on the Road to Emmaus. It’s a story worth repeating again and again because it is at the very heart of the Gospel. It highlights the living hope found only in the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

While the two disciples were walking along, presumably late on Sunday afternoon, they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened (24:14) concerning the death, burial, and disappearance of Jesus from his tomb. Luke writes that while these two disciples were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing Jesus (24:15-16). Although Jesus was now in a glorified state (after his resurrection from the dead), it is clear that he had a body that was similar to his former human body. The two disciples walking to Emmaus thought he was just another traveler, and they did not recognize the stranger. However, their lack of recognition was a divine act, as Luke writes that their eyes were kept from recognizing Jesus.

The two disciples who had walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus remembered how their hearts burned within them as Jesus had opened to them the scriptures. Some of our understanding comes through words; scripture, stories, hymns, liturgy and conversation. But some of our understanding comes through no words at all, just as the disciples, upon reaching Emmaus, recognized Jesus in the breaking of bread. Some of our understanding, too, comes apart from language -- the sacraments, a gentle touch, and tears of regret or joy, an affirming smile, a moment of beauty.

What happens to these two disciples as they journey from Jerusalem to their home in the city of Emmaus seven miles away? A stranger, whom we know is Jesus, joins them. They can hardly bring themselves to discuss it, they are so saddened by the events of the last three days. Their friend, their master, their rabbi, the one they describe as a mighty prophet, has been unjustly condemned to death and violently killed on a cross. They say to their companion, “Are you the only person in all of Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place?” But on that first Easter day that living hope was far from being established in the experience of the two people we read of in the gospel lesson. Let’s put ourselves in their shoes as they set out on the seven-mile walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

It was a HEART-BREAKING EXPERIENCE: Have you ever noticed that some of the saddest words in the English language begin with the letter D? For example, disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, despair and death. All of these are summed up in the words of Cleopas and his companion to the stranger who joined them on the Road to Emmaus. They had left the dispirited and confused band of disciples with the events of Good Friday fresh in their memories.

The two disciples summed up the situation very neatly, "we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." Human hope is a fragile thing, and when it withers it’s difficult to revive. Hopelessness as a disease of the human spirit is desperately hard to cure. When you see someone, you love and care for is overtaken by illness, which goes on and on, despair sets in. It almost becomes impossible to hope for recovery, to be even afraid to hope because of not being able to cope with another letdown. If you like to learn more about the experience of Resurrected Jesus, please join us in our worship service on Sunday at 11:00 AM.

Peace!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister

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