



WHERE THE DOORS OF THE CHUCH SWING OPEN ON THE HINGES OF LOVE AND PEACE

The Pastor's Portion

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Spiritual Nourishment for the Soul



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The word for today is peace. In fact, let us say that is the word for the week. This week, as we face uncertainty, confront fear, wrestle with our own insecurities and emotions, let us remember the words of Jesus when he says: Peace Be with you. Practicing deep peace takes practice. Find a comfortable place to sit and be still. Begin to take deep continual breaths in and out. Relax into the knowledge that God is God. You are the beloved of God. God's Spirit rests on you and in you God finds favor. Allow yourself to be surrounded by the peace of God.



Weekly Inspiration:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
 where there is hatred, let me sow love;
 where there is injury, pardon;
 where there is doubt, faith;
 where there is despair, hope;
 where there is darkness, light;
 where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not
 so much seek
 to be consoled as to console,
 to be understood as to understand,
 to be loved as to love.
 For it is in giving that we receive,
 it is in pardoning that we are
 pardoned,
 and it is in dying that we are born to
 eternal life.
 Amen. **Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi**

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JOIN US FOR MID WEEK BIBLE STUDY ON WEDNESDAY AT 7PM

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Luke 24: 13-35



This Emmaus Road story, made me think of a contrasting story of Saul's conversion on the Road to Damascus as he traveled to find more Jesus followers to persecute. In that experience he was struck by some force, knocked off his horse and then heard the voice of Jesus speaking to him questioning him as to why he was persecuting his followers. In that experience, Jesus convicted Saul, Saul was immediately converted and became a believer, changing his name to Paul, who goes on a mission to evangelize the world of the Gentiles. Now there is much more to unpack with this story, but, I think it stands in stark contrast to this Emmaus road story.

In the Testimony column in the March 2018 Christianity Today, Iranian refugee Annahita Parsan says, "For some, the journey to seeing Jesus as Savior is sudden and dramatic like it was on the road to Damascus. For others, the journey to faith looks more like the road to Emmaus: a gradual realization that Jesus is closer than the air we breathe" (p. 88).

These are insightful words that got me to thinking about how coming to faith and growing in faith is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. What is important is that we stay on the path. Sometimes we do indeed need to be knocked off our (high) horse, as Paul was on the way to Damascus. And our high horses can be our anything from our intellect, our self-reliance, our egos, our petty and puny agendas, to our titles in and out of the church, our ignorance and arrogance, our indifference and our lack of empathy and compassion for people who are other than we are. God has the complete ability (a we can see from this COVID experience) to KNOCK us down, drive us to our faces in prayer, begging for mercy, begging for

salvation, begging for

transformation and rebirth.

But, oftentimes we need a quieter, gentler approach, as the Emmaus disciples experienced when Jesus inconspicuously walked alongside them.

My personal journey of faith has initially been more along the Damascus Road lines. However, the more life unfolds, the more the interesting, mysterious and challenging events present themselves, the more it feels like an Emmaus road experience.

The Damascus Road experience was my definitive call experience. It was the overwhelming experience of God, the immediacy and urgency of the call to ministry on my life, the DEMAND for obedience and compliance, the sense that God would not take no for an answer. Jesus was in my face, literally extending his hand and inviting me to join him on his ongoing mission to live, to love to serve. It is an experience I will never forget. It happened in mid-air between my flight from Arizona to New York. And I can see the image of Jesus vividly and as though I am looking at you right now, even over this technology. I was listening to

worship music on my ipod and I felt a presence and when I lifted my head, there was Jesus standing in front of me like an apparition. He had his hand extended and he said to me, won't you join me? Now I was already in the church, I was already an ordained deacon, but somehow, this level of intimate connection with Jesus made my commitment stronger, my belief stronger, made me stronger in my resolve to do the work and participate in the ministry of Christ.

But alas, time passes, the joys and the pain of ministry, the difficulty of ministering in a world that does not know Christ, a world that professes Christianity, but does not really follow Jesus, the challenge of ministry in a world that is selfish and self-absorbed and insular and introverted in their faith and expression of faith...if they have any faith at all...it becomes so much harder because we are crucified daily on the cross of social indifference, political isolation, congressional gridlock and economic stagnation.

I am now keenly aware that the passion and the conviction for ministry-- for the life of faith is something that one must kindle on a

daily basis--especially when you live in a world that is full of so much disappointment. It becomes easy to forget the words of Jesus, it becomes easy to forget that despite what it may look like, Jesus is still walking with us, still talking to us, still egging us on to greater works.

I can only imagine the disappointment, the discouragement, the depression of Cleophas and his companion, undoubtedly disciples of Jesus, as they witnessed or heard about the brutal bloody crucifixion of Jesus on that old rugged tree. A form of death so definitive, so final, so demonstrative of the utter depravity of the Roman Empire.

You can hear their sorrowful souls as they talked about Jesus. They thought He was the Messiah who would overthrow Roman domination and oppression and restore Israel as a sovereign country. They thought Jesus was the Messiah who had come and would rule the world. They thought he was the conquering king who would usher in a new kingdom that would crush and cast Caesar's kingdom under foot. Instead, Jesus was executed in the most

humiliating way possible: crucifixion.

They must have felt they entered into a kind of twilight zone. Finding themselves, like we do today in a place and space that we certainly did not anticipate and definitely did not ask for. We live in a world that is full of so much disappointment, that it becomes easy to forget that we walk in the power of the resurrection despite what it may look like.

I can only imagine that they soon forgot that this was a truly mysterious and powerful man of God who they had witnessed heal and set captives of the illusion of being nothing, free. I can only imagine that they forgot how he taught them, how he loved them, how he healed them—how he extended his hand to them.

I can only imagine that they were thrust into a sort of twilight zone moment, causing them to forget his words of assurance, his promises to never leave us, his admonition not to fear anything, his directions to pray in his name, his instructions to build community and to care for the least of these. They surely forgot his

prediction of his death, his assurance that he would rise.

These men were thrust into a whole new paradigm, one where their leadership was lost, their hope was destroyed, their fear was raging. In a way, it is like what we are experiencing now. We are thrust into unknown territory. We are powerless to stop this virus that we cannot see nor control. We are anxious, and afraid, and we are lacking in effective leadership because the leaders are grasping at straws and they are equally dumbfounded. Yup! We have entered the twilight zone.

And while some people are praying and protesting for our ability to return to “normal”, there are some of us that are praying that this twilight zone moment will be the catalyst for a new world order—a new paradigm where the world is a kinder and more compassionate and equal world, a world that honors the beauty and sanctity of our creation, of all human beings irrespective of race and national origin, a world that is more equal and just.

So while we acknowledge and accept that we never would have chosen to

be blindsided by a pandemic, while we never would have chosen the pain, and the death and the uncertainty, we pray that this event shakes people the world over out of their lethargy, out of their privileged comfort zones, out of their pews and from behind their computers and their desks to make sure that there are none hungry, there are none homeless, there are none orphaned or killed by police, that there are no immigrant children detained in deplorable conditions at the borders. There are some of us who are hoping that this pandemic ignites us to kindness and compassion, and grace and mercy and justice in healthy community with one another.

And the good news that I must share with you today is that we all should be comforted and assured by the promises and hope that Christ offers us. Even given everything that is happening, even despite the difficulty of being a follower of Jesus, even despite the massive ignorance and arrogance of the majority of people who wish to see things go back to the same old same old, we should be comforted that just as Jesus was walking with Cleophas, and his friend, talking to

them--being with them in their grief, in their depression, in their anxiety, even in their fear---So he is with us. That was his promise, that was his assurance, that is what we live to know and experience. This is both our hope and our assurance. Aren't you comforted that no matter what is going on, Jesus is walking with you?

AND THE real question is, will we recognize Jesus? Will we know that it is Jesus walking with us or will we think it is a shadow or a phantom or a ghost? As they walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, as they walked those 7 miles-- Jesus was walking with them and talking to them, teaching them about how his death and resurrection were foretold by the prophets. He was talking, always teaching---they were listening, and yet they did not recognize him. They had no idea it was him. How many of us are like that? Jesus is talking to us, walking with us, teaching us, exhorting us, yet we are so inured by the busyness and the pain and the pressure of our daily lives, our grief, our own petty plans and projects in and out of the church, that we miss the fact that Jesus is walking right beside us. So consumed with self, that we just don't get it.

And I love what happens next, because it was when they invited Jesus into their home, when they sat still long enough to FOCUS on this so called stranger, it was then, when Jesus took the Bread and BROKE it, and gave it to them...it was then and only then that they recognized who he was.

Every communion Sunday we are supposed to experience this. Every time we take bread or any food, we are supposed to remember that is in in the fellowship, in the breaking of bread that we see the Risen Christ. That is what Jesus does with us, he takes us, he breaks us and then he distributes us to the world to be NOURISHMENT for the world. Yet, so many of us end up as junk food for the world, so full of empty calories that we cannot nourish anyone we cannot sustain anyone, we cannot feed anyone because we ourselves are parched and starving for the bread of LIFE.

So, on this day let us remember that Jesus walks with us through this pandemic, that Jesus walks with us through our trials and tribulations, that Jesus talks to us and instructs us and guides us. And we could walk 7

miles, or 70 or 700, 7,000 or 7 million miles, but Jesus, the one who invited us to participate in his ongoing ministry, will never faint nor grow weary. So, keep going family, do not grow weary for it is in your striving to commune with Jesus to work with Jesus that we will experience a greater and brighter and more loving world. Amen