Sermon for the 3rd Sunday of Easter April 26, 2020 “The blueprint”

Acts 2:14a,36-41

1 Peter 1:17-23

Luke 24:13-35

Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17

Most of us like to know where we’re going…most of the time. If we’re old enough, we remember using maps that were carefully folded and impossible to refold. But they helped us figure out where we were and how to get to where we were going. These days, everyone uses a GPS device of some kind. It’s the same idea, but it doesn’t require any folding. It tells us where we are and it shows us how to get to where we want to go. If you look around our country right now…at any corner of it…any state or any city…it’s hard to tell where we are. We’re in a bit of a pickle at the moment. Life has changed dramatically over the last 8 weeks. We’ve never been here before....or at least our generation hasn’t been here before. It happened about 100 years ago when the Spanish flu roared through our cities and towns and countries all over the world leaving thousands of dead in its wake. But that was back then. This is modern times. We have good medicine, we have fine hospitals, we have skilled doctors and nurses and medical professionals of all kinds. This sort of thing isn’t supposed to happen to *us*! Our lives are not supposed to be up-ended. *We* aren’t supposed to be in peril. As we ponder our situation, it’s hard to find the words for our anxiety, our angst, our sense of confusion, and our feelings of helplessness.

Well, these are not new feelings among human beings. Let’s catch up with the two fellows who are walking the sad road back to Emmaus from Jerusalem. Their world has been up-ended, too. Everything they had dreamed for and counted on has been stripped away from them. They have no future…at least not one that they are looking forward to. They had thrown their lot in with an itinerant preacher who promised a new way of life…here on this earth. He called it the Kingdom of God and he talked about it a lot. It sounded so wonderful and so promising. It was a kingdom where there was no oppression or domination by another country. There was justice for everybody. The social strata was turned upside down. The rich were going to be yanked down from their high places and the poor were going to be elevated. No one would be hungry and there would be peace and there would be safety for everyone. It sounded too good to be true. And perhaps it was. But is was a dream worth working for, worth sacrificing for, worth dying for if need be. So they had left all they knew…their homes, their villages, their families, their friends, their synagogues and their occupations…and they threw their lot in with Jesus. They had left their old life to search for a new and better one. And they had built their new life around Jesus. When Jesus was hung on a cross and they stood in the shadows and watched his life slip away or they bolted for the hillside to keep from having to watch or to avoid the same fate themselves…….they watched their world blow up and their future taken away from them. Destroyed. All their dreams. All their hopes for a new and better world got blown up in their faces.

Has anything like that ever happened to you? Have you built your life around someone or something and made plans for the future that included that someone or that something and then you lost everything? It’s a terrible feeling to lose the center of your earthly universe and it’s a terrible feeling to lose the future that you thought you were going to have. It’s two different kinds of grief. The hurt that goes with losing what you had; and the hurt that goes with losing what you thought you were going to have. It isn’t just the loss of what is; it is also the loss of what might have been. No deeper disappointment is expressed and no sadder words were ever spoken than, “We had hoped………” That phrase tugs at our hearts. And they had no idea what would happen next. And now we are suddenly aware that we don’t either. Our future is not assured. Our life has changed dramatically and we’re worried about our physical well-being as well as our economic one. It’s no longer life as usual. All the dreams that we have for the future may be slipping away and we can’t do anything about it. In many ways, we are walking along that road to Emmaus as well. We have a sense of grief; some fear about the future; a sense of loss; a sense of confusion and a fair amount of anxiety.

We’re walking with those two unnamed travelers on the road to Emmaus. They are walking the sad walk from Jerusalem back home. They are probably walking pretty slowly as despondent people deep in conversation often do. It is the day of the resurrection. They have heard the rumors that Mary Magdalene told the disciples that she has seen the Lord. But they don’t believe it. The disciples didn’t believe her either. They are talking outloud to one another trying to process all that has happened in the last traumatic three days. Like any of us who have had our worlds explode into fragments, they are trying to make sense of it all. They are trying to figure out how to make it end differently. They keep going over and over the events they’ve experienced and like rewinding a video tape over and over again, they keep hoping they will be able to change the ending…….but they can’t. No matter how hard they try to change things…….the end they know is always the end they know.

While they’re walking along, a stranger sidles up next to them and sort of inserts himself into the conversation. They don’t know how he got there. They didn’t see him approach, he was just suddenly with them…….walking along, sharing their journey with them and asking questions about what’s on their minds. They have no idea who he is, but they are only too happy to have fresh ears to hear their tale of trauma and confusion. And we’re walking right along with them with our own tales of trauma and confusion. Jesus is listening to them. And Jesus is listening to us as well.

And then an odd thing happens, this stranger begins talking about the prophets in the Old Testament and what they had to say about the Messiah. He explains to his two bewildered new friends that all the things they are telling him about what happened to Jesus of Nazareth three days ago in Jerusalem were predicted by the prophets. He is opening up the sacred scriptures to them……interpreting them in light of the most recent events in Jerusalem. And he is speaking of Jesus in the 3rd person as if he is speaking about someone else. Jesus hasn’t explained anything to us yet, but He is walking along side us.

As these two approach Emmaus and the sun starts to set, they extend the customary hospitality to Jesus and ask him to stay with them for the night. He can get something to eat and he can have a safe place to sleep. Jesus hesitates at first and then accepts. Over dinner, Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to the others. Suddenly they know who this stranger is. Jesus is known to them in the breaking of the bread…….just as he is for us 2000 years later. When we worship together and celebrate the holy communion together……we take bread, we bless it, we break it and it is given to us…….and we know Jesus in the breaking of the bread. And as mysteriously as Jesus appeared on the road to Emmaus, he disappears into the night having opened the eyes and the hearts and the souls of these two despondent followers. They are so riveted and consumed by what they have experienced that they race back to Jerusalem to tell the others. They, too, have seen the Lord. They have experienced the power of the risen Jesus. They have broken bread with him and their eyes and hearts are open and they are bursting with the news. They can’t wait to tell the others. The journey back to Jerusalem wasn’t in the safety of daylight, it was a precarious middle-of-the-night journey because they couldn’t contain themselves. They virtually flew back to Jerusalem in half the time it took them to get to Emmaus.

Is it just a coincidence that the night before he died, when he was eating supper with his disciples, Jesus took bread, he blessed it, he broke it and then he gave it to them? He explained that this was his body that was broken for them. And the cup of wine was his blood of the new covenant. And whenever they remembered him, he wanted them to remember him in this way. He gave them the blueprint for how to be with him and how to be with each other. He did it *before* he died and he did it *after* his resurrection. Could that mean that he is on both sides of the veil? Is this how he has connected us to all the saints?

Stop and think for a minute about the way our worship service is organized. We praise God, we listen to scripture, we hear the interpretation of scripture, we exchange the Peace which is the Peace Christ gives not the Peace the world gives us, we share the Holy Eucharist and the revelation of the risen Lord in our midst and we are sent out into the world to Proclaim the gospel to all we see! This one story…….this story of the two and their encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus holds the blueprint for the worship that continues for more than 2000 years later. This is what it means to be the Church. When 2 or 3 are gathered together in his name, Jesus has promised that he will be among us…….just as he was with the 2 on the road to Emmaus and just as he was with the disciples cowering behind locked doors. Whether we’re walking in our neighborhoods or staying behind closed doors in our homes, Jesus sidles up next to us. No one ever sees him approach, but that doesn’t mean he isn’t there.

Jesus simply shows up……..as he said he would…….and as he still does. Unannounced. Unobtrusively. Without fanfare. But with the power to remove the scales from our eyes and to set our souls on fire. Just as the two on the way to Emmaus said when they figured out who had been teaching them the meaning of scripture, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road while he was opening the scriptures to us?” Perhaps our hearts have to be broken before they can be burning.

As he promised, Jesus comes to us. He meets us where we are……on the road to Emmaus trying to make sense out of incredible destruction, heartbreak and grief or he comes to us behind locked doors and locked hearts or he comes to us wherever we are. He gave us the blueprint for communion with him and each other. Whether we call for him or not, Jesus comes to us……..just as he said he would……and He comes when we seem to need him most.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.