

Sermon 043017 Awareness
Scripture Luke 24: 13-36
Sermon Title- A Secret For You

We are in the period of the Christian calendar called Easter time or Eastertide. We have Easter Sunday then 50 days until Pentecost; what is called the 50 great days. Eastertide is when we look at the stories from the gospels that happen after the resurrection, the post-resurrection stories. We know stories of Doubting Thomas and the miraculous catch of fish that are among the post-resurrections stories.

It has always struck me as remarkable that when the writers of the four gospels come to the most important part of the story they have to tell, they seem to tell it in whispers. I'm talking about the resurrection, of course. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Churches ring the bells, sing Alleluia, shout the good news, but the gospels tell just a few quiet stories of the Risen Christ appearing to a few people. Even the resurrection itself took place without a single witness. The people that get the news in the gospels, whether hearing about the resurrection, or being visited by the Risen Christ, don't realize it or don't believe it. It's like the gospels are singing the old Beatles song, "Listen, do you want to know a secret.... Ohoo, closer, let me whisper in your ear."

The way the gospel writers tell it, Jesus came back from death not in a blaze of glory, but more like a candle flame in the dark, flickering first in this place, then in that place, then in no place at all. You could make the case that if the gospel writers made the whole resurrection

thing up in order to convince people, they would have had choruses of angels and pyrotechnics in the story. But they didn't. They did not describe the resurrection as convincingly as they could; they described it as truthfully as they could. The most extraordinary thing that ever happened, maybe the reason that they wrote their gospels at all, they tell almost as a secret. Maybe for the writers of the four gospels, the news is so precious, and holy, and fragile, and unbelievable, and true, to tell it any other way would be to somehow dishonor it. To proclaim the resurrection the way the gospels do, you'd have to say it in whispers: "Christ is risen." Like that.

Christian churches, needless to say, have not whispered the resurrection, but shout it- and who can blame us? It was St. Paul who was blunt enough to come strait out and write it to the Corinthians: "If Christ has not been raised (from the dead), then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." (1 Cor 15: 14) It is a great and glorious thing on the powerful and beautiful occasion of Easter to proclaim that even in this mad and murderous world that the miracle of miracles actually took place.

That is why the Sundays after Easter are so precious. They are so precious because in their comparatively subdued low-key way, they seem closer to how the reality of the resurrection took place in the gospels. These stories might give us the best chance to experience the resurrection for ourselves.

That is how we encounter two disciples as they walked the seven miles from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. They were walking along trying to process all that had happened with each other. The story from Luke says, “Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.” (Lk 24: 15b) They were kept from recognizing him. (Pause)

What was that all about? The Risen Christ walked with them and they were kept from recognizing him. What would prevent them from recognizing Jesus in their midst? They had heard the report that Jesus, who had been brutally executed, was alive. That was astonishing, perplexing, and exciting news that left them uncertain, confused, and cautious. It was news that they didn’t expect and maybe didn’t believe. If the resurrection did happen, it had not changed the world. Rome still ruled and the Risen Jesus was nowhere to be found. So, they went back on the road toward home. They were heading back to the mundane, the business as usual, with dashed hopes, unfulfilled dreams, squelched enthusiasms and a disappointing and questionable future. The most extraordinary chapter in their lives appeared over. Time to pick up where they’d left off.

Did you ever feel that way? It has been two weeks since Easter Sunday happened for us. What did we do? We went back to our lives. The Red Sox have started their season and are looking pretty darn good, I might add. The Boston Marathon, with its extraordinary history, was a

glorious event. The garden probably has new scratches in it, maybe peas and lettuce planted. The duties of life need to be done. If you experienced the transformation of Easter, and I hope you did, it may well have faded at least somewhat. The world comes intruding back into our psyche. We try to be faithful, but in the struggles of life, it is sometimes difficult. We get caught between two worlds- caught between the way life is and the way it ought to be.

What spiritual valley are you in today? What spiritual mountaintop have you left behind? What transition are you in? Perhaps it is a predictable transition- going through the stages of life: retirement, aging, the death of a loved one. Then there are the unpredictable changes that come along- changes in our employment; our financial ups and downs; a divorce, a move, the loss of a dream, or the ending of a project. How we manage our transitions, how we deal with the spiritual valleys makes a huge difference in our lives.

When we are transitioning from something, especially something big, we are moving beyond yet we are still back there as we try to process what happened. We also wonder what affect the thing we are leaving will have on our future and who we are to be. With all that processing taking place in our minds and our emotions and in our spirits, we miss things. It's like when you are driving and suddenly realize that you can't remember the last five minutes. It's like when reading a book and you turn the page and realize that you have no idea what you just

read. It's like when you have a letter to mail and you see a mailbox for the first time despite the fact that you've passed it a hundred times without noticing it. We miss things all the time, some big and some small.

The disciples on the Emmaus road were kept from recognizing the Risen Christ- why? A hundred different things were happening for them at that time. Plus, maybe they did not recognize him because they were not expecting Him. It was not until He sat to eat with them and he broke the bread that they recognized Him.

Do you expect to see Jesus? I'll guess not. Not only are you running a hundred things in your mind, not only are you in the human condition of transition, but maybe you are just not expecting Him. Maybe you are kept from recognizing Him.

I believe that even though those disciples were kept from recognizing him, Jesus recognized them, that he saw them at that moment like they were the only two people in the world. I believe that two thousand years later, even as I speak these words, Jesus also sees each of us like that.

I believe that in this dark world where you and I see so little because of our unrecognizing eyes he, whose eye is on the sparrow, sees each one of us as a precious child of God. I believe that because he sees us, not even in the darkness of death are we lost to him or to each other. I believe that whether we recognize him or not, or believe in him or not,

or even know his name, he comes and walks with us on whatever road we are following. I believe he is with us in moments when we are moved to compassion, kindness, and love. I believe he is with us when we receive acts of kindness, compassion, and love.

Jesus offers us, the way he did at Emmaus, the bread of life. He offers us new hope, a guiding light, a new vision of life that the dark world cannot overcome. Listen, do you want to know a secret... Christ is risen and he is with us. AMEN