

“See and Say”
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky
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Luke 24:13-35

It wasn’t supposed to end that way. Dead Messiah was a contradiction of terms, so they left Jerusalem to go home, nothing to keep them there anymore. To help pass the time, to soothe the pain, they talked, wondering what went wrong, how did it happen, what did it mean; wondering if they would ever feel that sense of excitement and promise again; wondering if they could ever allow themselves to trust, to hope, in that way again.

Probably not. Disappointment like that leaves a mark. Nobody wants to feel like a fool, especially not twice. Nobody wants to invest everything in something to see it come to nothing, so they were going home, which meant more than a destination, but a way of life they knew before Jesus swept them away, an ordinary life of moderate risk, reasonable predictability, and simple practical goals.

As they walked, a stranger sidled up beside them, curious about their conversation, and they were surprised, perhaps a little offended that he could be so ignorant of events so important to them. “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem that does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” That snarky attitude of theirs was totally uncalled for.

Tens of thousands of pilgrims gathered each year for Passover. Only a small slice knew about Jesus, and of that group, most saw Jesus as just another false Messiah who got what he deserved on the cross, but these two disciples got him caught up, explaining the story, including the most recent reports from early that morning of an empty tomb and a vision of angels, “but they did not see him.” That was decisive for them and deeply ironic for us who know who the stranger is and how this story ends.

Of course, it wasn't their fault that "they did not see him," did not see Jesus for who he was. Some reckon they were too grief-stricken to think straight and recognize Jesus. Others accuse them of lacking of faith. Still more give them the benefit of the doubt and think that the resurrected body of Jesus looked different enough that these disciples could have easily mistaken him for somebody else. But, in fact, God kept them from seeing Jesus, as Luke tells us "their eyes were kept from recognizing him."

It hard to see how, on the evening of the resurrection, this would serve any purpose, but it gave Jesus an opportunity to tell these two disciples the story they knew in a different way. To paraphrase, Jesus said to them, "You've missed the whole point. Let's start from scratch and look at Moses and the prophets and what they predicted and how all that fits in with the Messiah you followed, a Messiah who suffered out of necessity to fulfill God's glory."

What those disciples thought about his reinterpretation of scripture, Luke breathes not a single word, but when they reached Emmaus, their waypoint for the night, the stranger – that strange man Jesus – keep walking, but they convinced him to stop and stay with them, to be with them, and at dinner, he took and blessed and broke and gave the bread, and the veil God had put in place lifted. Suddenly they saw him for who he was, and in that instant, Jesus vanished. Mission accomplished; time for him to move on. Suddenly, they remembered their hearts burning "while he was opening the scripture," and it all fell into place.

Straightaway, despite the darkness, they hustled back from Emmaus to Jerusalem, a trip of several miles, to share their story where the disciples had gathered, and in that place with those people, they found a new home, an entirely new way of life, completely unlike anything they'd experienced before, an extraordinary life where risk and predictability and practicality were no longer much of a concern.

Imagine what they talked about on their way, wondering how it happened and what might happen next; filled with wonder at this intense sense of resurrection joy; wondering if anything else could ever set their souls on fire like this, but of course not, what a foolish thing to think. Imagine them sidling up beside a stranger and asking, “Do you know what took place in Jerusalem this morning? I just heard some astonishingly good news!” Imagine them extending the hospitality to that stranger. “It’s dark. Come stay with us. We have freshly broken bread and light, and there are no strangers, only friends, a community of grace where anyone, where everyone who chooses can belong.”

That’s the power of God at work in the scripture that causes hearts to burn, in the sacrament that opens eyes to see. How will we respond to that crucial moment when it all comes together and we know that Jesus Christ is here, alive and real, within us and among us, ready to leap out into the world through us? Will we leave here and trudge home, back to where we were before Jesus came crashing into our lives, back to where things seem to make more sense?

I don’t see why. I can’t imagine what might be there that could possibly compare with making a home where Jesus dwells. Then again I can, because staying silent seems so much safer, but a Quiet Disciple is a contradiction in terms. I do see why the old homestead feels so appealing. Even if the predictability is bleak, at least it is predictable. Even if the practical is boring, it beats the risk of investing everything in someone. Going back to where we were makes us feel as if we’re in control. Things go back to normal, whereas when we follow Jesus, not so much. He’s in control, and life is far from normal when he’s around.

But then there’s joy to consider, not happiness, a lovely if pale substitute, but real joy, the joy that inspires us to dance and sing and to create beauty in countless forms. Consider hope, too. Not mere optimism that things generally turn out OK, but real hope that tells us that things

have already turned out much more than OK – fabulous, in fact – because the future has already been won by Jesus.

Or how about love? Not affection or attraction or vague feelings of good will and acceptance, but a fierce unconditional love that destroys death, transforms lives, and gives us transcendence, the ability to see, to truly see with perspective in proportion, motivating us to kindness in a world that can be cruel. And that mission is urgent. We recently received a reminder of that.

A few days ago, at Transylvania University in Lexington, my *alma mater*, Ann's *alma mater*, a man with a machete went into a campus coffee shop, and asked a young woman what political party she supported. She said, "Republican," and he replied, "You're safe." He asked another young woman, and with great bravery, seeing what had just happened, she answered, "Democrat," and he slashed her. Not a life-threatening injury, thank God, but every person in that coffee shop, every person on that campus, suffered wounds that will take years to heal. It is urgent that speak, that we witness the love of God that connects us with others and all of us with God, a love that intertwines, forging a strong cord not easily broken.

It wasn't supposed to end that way, with Jesus dead on a cross. That why those two disciples left Jerusalem and made their way to Emmaus. It wasn't supposed to end that way, and it didn't. But neither was it supposed to end with an empty tomb and Jesus walking the earth. Nobody expected that, yet it happened, and those disappointed disciples ran back to Jerusalem. Where will we go? What will we say? We know the answer to both of those questions, and if you think you don't, ask a disciple. They have a story to tell. Amen.

