

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
April 26, 2020- 3rd Sunday of Easter (A)
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17; 1 Peter 1:17-23; **Luke 24:13-35**

**“Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes
were kept from recognizing him.” †**

Each of us has been on the road to Emmaus...

All of us have travelled that road, though we may never have physically been to the Holy Land, or visited that place some 7 miles outside of Jerusalem. Still, each of us has travelled that very road those disciples travelled in the Gospel story today. Consider the many times we have been deeply involved in our own thoughts and activities... distracted by fear, worry or even excitement... so self-absorbed that we could notice little else around us... and consider the fact that we may have met Jesus, but didn't realize it.

Three weeks after Easter is a good time to consider how similar our lives might be to those of Jesus' disciples. Especially as we reach the 7th week of self-isolation, feeling like we've reached our wit's end! During this time of fear & confusion, when things we once thought were worth our very lives and all that mattered seem to have vanished. For some of us, it's left us feeling emotionally, spiritually, and physically devastated and abandoned. I have felt that way in the past few weeks, sometimes like I'm falling apart and overwhelmed by life.

In my prayer time this week, I remembered an experience from long ago, shortly after graduating from college in NC. I was a seminarian in residence in a church in Fayetteville, a large military town with some of the largest Army and Air Force bases in the US. I lived in the rectory with 2 priests. The rectory was directly adjacent to the church building, thus encouraging people in need to visit... And we had this obnoxious doorbell, connected to a school bell upstairs... whenever it rang the buzz made the whole house shake. The rector was a former Benedictine monk, who insisted that one of us must always be around— 'in case,' as he put it, 'Jesus came by.' It was interesting to me that he was often away playing golf or at some country club having dinner with parishioners....

Anyway, it was on one such evening, actually early evening on Easter Sunday, and the other priest, Philip (who became my dear friend and spiritual director) and I, were resting upstairs. It had been a busy weekend with 7 services, including a 3-hour Saturday night Easter Vigil and a 4:30am Sunrise service that day. I was exhausted, as the seminarian (I did all the set-up and take down and preparation and planning; there was no liturgy committee, no Altar Guild, just me) and Philip, who sang and preached every service, was nearly passed out. We were relaxing in the upstairs common sitting room, talking about how well things went and how we would sleep so well in the coming hour, when that doorbell rang. So loud, I jumped and Philip fell off the couch.

“Don’t worry, Father... I’ll get it,” I said as I ventured downstairs. Indeed, there was someone in need and I returned upstairs to get my shoes and wallet when the priest said, “Well, who is it?” I replied, with my usual sarcasm, “It’s Jesus.... And he’s drunk!”

Philip did not want me to handle this alone and came down to assess the situation. Sure enough, there in our living room was Jesus, ‘three sheets to the wind!’ We spent the next few hours listening to the man who had come to us, and helping to get him stable and bedded down in a hotel for the night. When we returned home, we both looked as if we had been out on the town ourselves and probably smelled that way too. But instead of complaining, we were invigorated... We both just looked at each other and smiled, “You know, the Rector was right, Jesus did drop by tonight!”

Jesus often comes to us at unexpected times, and as someone who is unimpressive, perhaps even unsightly, unkempt, and smelly... often as someone in need, or with a different perspective than our own. The Greek text of Luke’s Gospel we just heard is translated as “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” really implies that their eyes were not *strong enough* to grasp everything they saw. They were *preoccupied*... they were wound up in the human condition. We are all often preoccupied, self-involved, too busy with the hustle & bustle of our lives to recognize God when he comes to us, mainly because it’s unexpected.

We all of us walk that road to Emmaus... We have our own notion of how God should appear, how God should act. We move through life with our ordered, organized patterns and following our own agendas, until a stranger comes and turns our ideas upside down and challenges us. The stranger least expected—unsightly, unwanted, someone we might never associate with— a liberal... a conservative... someone gay... someone of a different race... a democrat... a republican... someone rich... someone who is poor— for God would *never* come in such a form, God would never speak through such a person! Think of the times you may have encountered the risen Lord, but your eyes were not able to recognize him. We’ve all walked that road to Emmaus...

As the Church, our **mission** is to share God’s love & reconciliation with the world around us... And that starts with recognizing that Jesus is indeed present with us, even when we fail to recognize him. May we be open to Jesus presence, and know that if we ask him to ‘stay with us,’ as the disciples did, he will. Jesus reassures us that he is here with us *even now*, despite the many hardships, struggles, and fears we face, despite COVID 19, despite the turmoil in the world around us, and he **will** be made known to us in unexpected ways!

Thus, we know, as it was put so well by the 14th Century English Mystic, Julian of Norwich, “All can be well, all will be well, and all shall be well.”

In nomine Patris.... †