

Sermon for April 8, 2018 – “In-between”

Second Sunday of Easter, Year B – Text(s): Luke 24:13-49

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A week into the season of Easter and we again hear the stories of that first day. We continue to be placed back with the disciples. In their grief. In their sadness. In their un-belief of what has transpired. A week into the season of Easter and we again hear the story of resurrection. A story of new life. **Changed** life because the way it **was** is not the way it **is**. And everyone knows it. Except for those who don't; Those who stand in fear at the empty tomb, those who wait to see Jesus for themselves, those who are on the road between the death of Good Friday and new life discovered on Easter Sunday. A week into the season of Easter and we again hear stories of encounters with the risen Christ. This first day, Easter day, is important. A week in and, not surprisingly, we're again hearing about its impact. And why wouldn't we? It's only the most important event in human history!

Today we encounter two disciples on the road to Emmaus when Jesus shows up alongside them. Only Cleopas and the other disciple don't know that it's Jesus, they don't recognize Him. This detail is significant, but they aren't special. The women, too, don't immediately recognize Jesus for who He is, instead thinking He's a gardener. The disciples, as we will see next week, don't believe that Jesus is amongst them until they hear Him speak and see and touch His wounds. They don't believe, and for that reason, huddle together in fear behind locked doors. See, in their minds, Jesus has died. It's done. He's gone. And this reality is heartbreaking. This first day when the disciples are between Jesus' death and trusting that the resurrection has taken place reveals something. It reveals how very difficult is for the human condition to move from the way it was to the way it is. And it's when Cleopas is talking to Jesus, not knowing it is Jesus, that this becomes so clear. Jesus asks the two men what they're talking about and Cleopas, surprised, replies: **“are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place?”** It's almost as if he'd asked Jesus where have you been these last few days buddy, living behind a rock? Well, actually, yes...yes, I have. “What things?” Jesus asks very simply. So, the disciples tell Jesus about who He was to them and how He had been handed over to death. We hear about who they had hoped Jesus would be, that He had come to redeem Israel but instead He was put to death. The way they thought the future would unfold didn't turn out as they'd hoped. The person they thought Jesus was, the one they expected Him to be, didn't turn out as they'd hoped. The stories they're now hearing about Jesus being risen are not how they expected life would unfold next. Despite what they'd been told it's not how they anticipated God would act. The disciples find themselves on a long road. A road that stretches between what they'd hoped for and the point where they could exclaim: “He is risen indeed.” It's an uncomfortable place to be.

Perhaps we know a little something about that, about what happens when the things we hope for don't unfold the way we anticipate. When our relationships are complicated, or breakdown, or break up. When our health or our bodies fail us. When our work takes a sudden turn. When our ministry doesn't grow or take root in the way we thought. When God doesn't act as we think God should or respond to us the way we'd hoped God would. Perhaps we know a little something about the discomfort of this in-between-ness between what has been and what will be. Even if things “will be ok” eventually death of any kind hurts. Whether it's the death of a loved one or a dream we'd once had, death is still death. Our emotions are the same. Our grief is still the same. As I heard once, a while back all change leads to loss, and all loss leads to grief. It's hard to see Jesus when we're expecting one thing, and another happens.

The disciples arrive where they think they're going only to have their eyes opened first, if only partially, in the re-telling of the sacred stories of Scripture. We know this because in our reading they say to each other, **“were not our hearts burning within us while He was talking to us on the road, while He was opening the scriptures to us?”**

The second time, and here their eyes are open fully, comes in Jesus' breaking of the bread. It's then that **"their eyes were opened and they recognized Him"**. Like the disciples, it's hard to see Jesus walking alongside us even under the best of circumstances. When preoccupied with life's struggles how hard do we make it for ourselves when our expectations blind us to the real Jesus? The sad reality is that it makes it nearly impossible! The good news is regardless of our ability to see Him clearly, Jesus walks the road with us. In doing so, God helps us let go and reframe our issues, and once they've been reframed the fact that Jesus was there the whole time becomes apparent. And, like the disciples, Jesus walks with us down the wrong road, even while calling us in a different direction.

A week into the season of Easter and we too are experiencing an in-between-ness as a congregation. We know that life won't be as it was, but we aren't yet sure of the way it is let alone what it will be. What we do need to recognize is what it can be! What we do know is that God promises to be with us to help make that a reality. God in Christ walks with us down all the roads of life. God in Christ walks with us in the in-between places. God in Christ walks with us when we come to a dead-end. God in Christ leads us down new paths.

A week into the season of Easter and we are again hearing stories of that first day. Again, with the unbelieving disciples and when all we think we see is death, Jesus is still walking out of tombs in order to show us new life.

Christ is risen indeed.

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.