

“Missing the Obvious”

I Peter 1: 17-23, Luke 24:13-35

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There is a phrase in Latin, *solvitur ambulando* can anyone figure out what it might mean? It means, “It will be solved in the walking.” When I hear this expression I think of my passion for the labyrinth. As you walk into the center of the labyrinth you name the things that you want to let go of. As you meditate there, God speaks a word that helps to empower you back into the world with a renewed sense of peace or clarity. In this prayerful act *solvitur ambulando* starts to make sense. So often we find a sense of peace or resolution by walking it out. There have other walking rituals that come to mind. Yesterday was that first real tease of spring; however we have little more than teasing so far. Truly I think the groundhog was lying when he promised us an early spring. I can’t wait to get out and walk for longer periods of time. I am not a winter walker. I long for 60-degree days with a light breeze and the warmth of sunshine on my face. Walking is like therapy for me. I work my way through challenging problems. I rehearse difficult conversations with someone. Sometimes I actually hush my busy mind long enough to hear God in this quiet, ambulatory time.

Clearly the saying *solvitur ambulando* would apply to the Gospel story we hear this morning. Two of Jesus’ disciples are heading home, trying to figure out what has just happened and what might happen next. In their seven mile walk to Emmaus there is silence, there are questions, there is sadness and there is anger. The preacher and teacher Bruce Epperly in speaking about this wonderful story says, “the gospel also proclaims that we will be transformed by movement—that we find the Risen Christ in moments of spiritual movement and growth, adventures in ideas, novel behaviors, and in pilgrimages by foot, automobile, or airplane. We are transformed by our moving. God’s Easter Spirit,” he says, “is found most significantly in process, rather than stability. To experience God’s inspiration more fully, we have to be on the move because God is on the move!” How true this is. Many of us have had our most moving spiritual encounters on some great adventure. Perhaps it was a trip of a lifetime to Antarctica or Turkey or Israel or Malawi. Perhaps it was the mission trip you just took to Biloxi or that you are preparing to take with our young people to Overlook Farm. Perhaps your adventure took you to Hartford Seminary to explore interfaith relationships. It is not as important where you go physically, but that you go to a place where God can speak to you in a new way.

There definitely is movement in this post resurrection drama. This road to Emmaus story takes place on Sunday, the day of resurrection, not two weeks hence as the lectionary placement might imply. Cleopas and his friend have set out for Emmaus soon after receiving word of the resurrection. Along the way, in the midst of their grief and pain, they have an amazing encounter with Jesus. Their story is not unlike Mary’s. When she finally realized she was talking to Jesus, she was transformed, not in the recognition alone, but in her willingness to go tell the others. She had to keep moving, telling the others what she had seen.

The two disciples this morning experience the resurrection in their walking. Tired, sad, and frustrated from what they have been through in the last week, they appear to be returning home. Perhaps they are going to regroup and rest or to ponder what to do next. This is all uncharted territory for them. No matter how many times Jesus said this was how it would end, they were expecting a different outcome than crucifixion. Perhaps Cleopas and his friend were not part of that intimate inner circle and had heard what would happen. They have heard rumors of a resurrection, but they don't understand what this means. They are swept away by their grief, not ready yet to ponder something as incredible or frightening as resurrection. As they walk, a third traveler joins them. Not understanding who this is, they walk a while with the Risen Christ, sharing their sorrow and loss with this presumed stranger.

Along the way Jesus continues to be their teacher, interpreting Scripture and telling them what these things must mean. Still they do not recognize him. Are they just dunderheads, as my son might say? Are they so engulfed in their grief they can not see what is right before their eyes? Is it part of the plan that they should not recognize Jesus until they have worked through their own grief, shared their story with someone who is willing to offer a compassionate ear? We don't know. What we know is that everything changes when they extend hospitality to this stranger. It was in the sharing of a meal that Jesus becomes known to them. As Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and offers it to his companions they finally recognize who he is. The light goes on; the rumors become truth, the stories move from fiction to fact. He is the Risen One, the one whom they so desperately miss. However, as soon as they recognize him, Jesus vanishes from their sight. Such is our experience of the resurrection. As quickly as we recognize what is happening, it is gone. Resurrection moments are not meant to linger, they are meant to inspire, to excite, to insight, and to empower.

Despite their fatigue and grief, these disciples can not sit still. They are off to Jerusalem to tell the others what they have just experienced. Yes, Mary was right. They too have seen the Risen Christ. It did not end, as they had feared. Jesus transforms even death. Something amazingly new is happening. Everyone needs to know about it. When have you ever felt such passion, such excitement? Have you ever had an experience where you just know the Spirit of God has touched you and you want everyone to know about it? *Solvitur ambulando*, "it will be solved in the walking." The truth will come to us when we keep moving, when we offer hospitality to the stranger, when we follow the Spirit's leading us to places we might be reluctant to go. Bruce Epperly says, "Mystical experiences come and go. Moments of assurance are fleeting. Inspiration is transitory. Health is temporary. But, God is in each detail, filling it with holiness and then moving on to the next and inviting us to follow."

The resurrection is an ongoing phenomenon. It happens each time we recognize the Risen Christ in the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup. Each time we share this sacred meal we practice the resurrection. The poet Wendell Berry ends his poem entitled, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" with the declaration to "practice resurrection." I encourage you to read it in its entirety. This Emmaus story reveals three ways to practice resurrection. The first way we practice resurrection is by offering

hospitality. Even though these two men walk with Jesus several miles, what might have taken the better part of a day on their way to Emmaus they still do not recognize their companion. It is not until they share a meal together that they understand. In this meal they are truly transformed and ready to practice resurrection by offering hospitality to others.

The disciples practice resurrection by caring for each other. These two followers accompanied one another in their grief. They supported each other in their pain. Then they found a companion to walk with them on their long, dark journey home. When folks are struggling through a difficult time, when they are engulfed in their grief, it is comforting to have a companion. That person may not say a word because so often we don't know what would be the right thing to say. However, they may journey with us or sit with us in silence or hold us as we cry. Jesus modeled for his disciples how we should care for each other. Even as he meets them on this journey, he does not presume what they are feeling or have experienced. He asks good questions that allow them to tell their story. "So, what were you discussing?" Now, these friends can tell him their story. Not so he can fix what has happened, but so he can empathize with how they are feeling. Caring for each other is an important way to practice resurrection.

This road to Emmaus story is a communion story. It is another opportunity for Jesus to share this sacred meal with people he loves. He reminds them that sharing this simple meal will be a way to continue his ministry of hospitality, love and grace. It is in the breaking of bread and in sharing the cup of blessing that we continue to receive the Holy One. Jesus performs four actions in this meal, four ways to experience the Risen Christ every time we share in it; Jesus takes, blesses, breaks, and gives. The writer Craig Kocher invites us to see in these four actions the whole story of God's saving work in Jesus. He says, "In Christ, God takes us as his friends. In Christ, God blesses us with the first fruits of creation and the gift of his very life. God is then broken on the cross for our salvation, and we are broken with him in his death, so that through Christ's resurrection we may be given away for the work of his kingdom." We do not celebrate communion simply to remember what Jesus did, but to be a part of what Jesus continues to do. Having shared this meal together we might then respond by rejoicing and running from this place to declare that in this sharing we too have seen the Risen Christ.

Mary ran from the tomb to tell the others she had met Jesus. These disciples continued their journey to Jerusalem with a renewed spirit and a joy that could not be contained because they too had met the Lord. We understand that the church is a respite along the journey. Our true delight and true resurrection joy happens when we venture forth, into the unknown, to meet the world that awaits us there. As disciples, we are to live as Jesus lived, offering hospitality, caring for the afflicted and sharing this sacred meal with anyone who is eager to meet the Risen One. Whenever we live as courageously and as faithfully, as our friends this morning have, then our eyes will be opened, our hearts will burn within our breasts and we will declare as they did, that I have seen the Lord! May it be so! Amen

Sources:

Wendell Berry, "The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" (poem)

Bruce Epperly, "Lectionary reflections for April 6, 2008," from Process and Faith
Lectionary Reflections website, April 6, 2008.

Craig Kocher, "Practice Resurrection" from Blogging toward Sunday, April 6, 2008.

Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front

Love the quick profit, the annual raise
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know.

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millenium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophesy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.
Listen to carrion - put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.
So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.
Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
a woman satisfied to bear a child?

Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?

Go with your love to the fields.
Lie easy in the shade. Rest your head.
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is nighest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

Wendell Berry