

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 6, 2008

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Risen Lord, be know to us in the breaking of the bread.

Late Friday afternoon he died, and then there was Saturday, which could possibly have been the worst day of their lives. The violence of the day before had numbed their senses; standing on that hill, not just as observers of a public crucifixion, but as followers, friends of the one who hung on the cross that day. They stood confused and in panic, asking “How could this possibly be happening?” And now it was the next day and that tragic event was beginning to sink in to their consciousness. As they stumbled through their day, there were times when they with their eyes closed, could still see the three crosses dark and angular against the sky; even with their fingers in their ears, they could still hear the sounds that had been made up there: especially the sound of the man they loved dying. And so Saturday must have been a very quiet and yet deeply distracting day. And after a while, they saw kids playing in the street and that was the first hint that life must go on, the same way that it always has, except of course it will never be the same again.

But Cleopas and his friend couldn't let it go. They had to get out of town. They wanted to forget what just happened. It was an event that crushed them: call it bitter disappointment, call it the crushing of great hopes, or the deepest longings. It was the kind of day when they just would throw things against the wall, feeling like everything had been shattered, and that they could never put the pieces together again. It was the way many of us felt when John Kennedy died, our president who called for the “new frontier.” It was the way many of us felt when Martin Luther King was assassinated, our great leader in the cause for unity of all races and peoples. And so

this Jesus of Nazareth. . . the one who said “Follow me,” and to whom they said “Yes!”, the one who made them feel accepted when they couldn’t by themselves, the one who had healed their brokenness when they felt they didn’t measure up, the one who knelt to wash their feet, and yet who stood the tallest of any man they had ever met in their earthly life; this one was now dead, and their heart ached and ached. And they wanted to forget.

And where did they go? They went to Emmaus. And where was that and why did they go there? No place particularly. And the only reason they went there was that it was some seven miles distant from a situation that had become unbearable. It would be like witnessing the assassination of John F Kennedy or Martin Luther King, and all you wanted to do was to go some place, any place, and forget that the world hold’s nothing sacred: that even the noblest ideas of humanity - ideas about love, freedom, and justice have always in time been twisted and tarnished by the selfish ends of others. Emmaus is where we go to forget, to try to forget about Jesus and the great failure of his life.

And though they tried, they soon learned that they could not forget the One who died that all may live, the one who broke the bread of heaven, so that heaven could be with us. For as they walk along to a town no one has ever heard of, they are suddenly aware of footsteps approaching then from behind. They are joined by a stranger who was Jesus, but whom they did not even recognize. Perhaps it was because when he was alive they had never really recognized him. They had seen him not as he actually was, but only as they had wanted him to be: a hero with easy answers to life’s hardest questions about love and pain, goodness and death. So they talk about what they were wanting to forget but not really, and later they stopped at an inn along the way

and they ate together. They kept talking and when, later, he took the bread in his hands, blessed it and broke it, then suddenly they knew who this stranger was. “Did not our hearts burn?” they later reflected. And no sooner did they know who he was than he vanished from their sight.

Much as they would have given to get him to stay, he would not. And that’s always how it is, we can never nail him down. He comes to us in our moments of darkness and brokenness, ones when we don’t anticipate him, and we recognize or we don’t, but the one thing we know is our lives are changed. We have just some glimmer of hope, some great joy, or some longing we didn’t know we had, or feel blessed for now we know our need of him in our lives. And don’t our hearts burn?

I overheard two little girls talking about this story last week at my parish in preparation for their Sunday School lesson today. “How do you know when you are blind?” one of them asked. “You don’t,” the other one said. “You only know afterward, when you can see.”

The blindness of the two disciples does not keep their Christ from coming to them. He does not limit his appearances just to those who have certainty in him. He comes to the disappointed, the doubtful, the sorrowful, those who dwell in dark places. Like the disciples, he comes to those who do not even know the bible, and who do not recognize him when they walk right beside him. He comes even to those who have given up and are walking away from life, which makes this whole story a story about the blessedness of brokenness, a story our world so much needs to hear and understand.

Beginning to end, Luke’s story of what happened on the road to Emmaus is the key to the

often heard question “Where is God?” “Where or how can I find God in my life?” Of course you could say he is present in the sunlit beauty of the day with the birds singing and the breeze gentle on your face, but that’s not when we need him most. We need him most when we find it well nigh impossible to find him. When we fear most we can’t. But, you see, the good news is we can’t lose him. He is right where he promised to be, and where he returns again and again. Risen Lord, be known to us in the breaking of the bread. AMEN