

Third Sunday of Easter, 26 April 2020

Luke 24:13-35

St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Norman Oklahoma

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What day is it?

I don't know how it is with you, but I've had to struggle a bit lately to remember. The things that used to mark the days—barbershop chorus rehearsal on Tuesdays, Wednesday evening prayer in the chapel, getting ready and gathering for Sunday worship—all of it has been put on hold, or rewritten, or moved online. It's hard to keep track of what day it is, or where you are in time, when the markers and signposts have been moved around so.

“On that same day” we hear in the Gospel reading “two of Jesus’ friends were walking toward the village of Emmaus.”

“On the same day” is a strange opening to the story, and intentionally so.

The same day as what? we may ask.

It was the first day of the week. An ordinary working day for most people. Nothing special, except that it was the day after the Sabbath. And not just any Sabbath.

The day before was the feast of the Passover. Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims who came to celebrate and remember God's mighty works of deliverance, from the ancient foe in ancient days. It was a festival, one of the great days of the year.

Jesus' friends had not had a particularly wonderful Passover celebration this year. While the feasting and the celebrating were going on around them, they were hiding in fear. For this day, the first day of the week, the day after the Passover, was the third day after their friend and teacher had been put to death. This day dawned for them as “the first day of the new normal”, back to work, back to routine, but now without their friend and leader, now completely unsure of what to do next.

A few of the women went to the tomb early in the morning, before the sun was up, prepared to anoint his body with oils and spices if they could figure out a way to get the stone rolled away from the door...and the stone was rolled away. And the tomb was empty. And there was a mysterious messenger dressed in white: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

And now, in the afternoon of the same day, Mr. Cleopas and his companion are on their way to Emmaus, in confusion and amazement. But they are not alone.

A stranger appears, and walks with them and talks with them along the way. They don't know who he is, they don't expect to recognize him. Especially when this stranger seems to know nothing about what has been going on lately. They have to explain the whole thing to him. “We had hoped that he was THE ONE...” And now hope is gone—but the women told us this morning that they'd seen angels—and we don't know what to think!

And the stranger begins to explore the story of God with them, the history of salvation “From Moses and the prophets...” They listen to words they know well, with new ears.

They arrive at the village, and begin to go into the house, and urge their new friend: Stay with us!” And he does, he enters the house and joins them at the table. And bread is taken, and blessed, and broken, and shared—and suddenly they recognize. They know. They understand.

And then, in that very moment, he is gone.
Now you see him; now you don’t.

That is just like Jesus, throughout the stories of the Resurrection. The moment that he’s seen and recognized, he’s off again—leading them on the journey of faith that did not end with a crucifixion or a stone sealed against grave robbers, or even at an empty tomb. The journey did not end there, on that day—it has not ended yet, as Jesus’ friends and followers are encouraged to continue walking the Way with Him, even now.

He was with them all along.

Before they acknowledged the stranger walking beside them, he was already there;
before they had the faintest inkling that he might have something to say worth hearing, he was already there;
as they walked and talked and discussed and debated, wrestling with ancient words to discover what those old stories might have to say to them, just at that moment in that place, he was already there.

Today, this third Sunday of Eastertide, the readings and prayers always focus on the Eucharist. In a moment we will pray the collect of the day: “O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work...”

But on this particular third Sunday of Eastertide, in the year 2020,
in the season of quarantine and social distancing,
we don’t have bread to break and share. We must, for now, be apart for a time.
And Jesus is already here. And there. And in all places and at all times.
With the handful of us gathered in this chapel; with you at home in your room right now.
He is with you, and all of us.
Whether we know it or not, whether we perceive him or not, he is already there.

And we can share him with one another, even while we are apart.
By phone, or Zoom, or Livestream, or a note in the mailbox.
We are part of Jesus’ body, even if we cannot break bread together just now.
He is with us, wherever we are.

Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord.
That we may discover you, meeting and loving and caring for us,
right here, right now.