

Easter 3rd Sunday 2015 B Cycle

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19 *You put the author of life to death, but God raised him from the dead; of this we are witnesses.*

Psalm 4 "Lord, let your face shine on us."

1 John 2:1-5a *Jesus Christ is the sacrifice that takes away our sins.*

Luke 24:35-48 *Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

♪♪ **We come to share our story, we come to break the bread,
We come to know our rising from the dead.** ♪♪

The Gospel today is the end of the story of the walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. At the beginning of this chapter from Luke's Gospel (Luke 24:13-35), two people are walking the 7 miles home after Jesus has been crucified. They are very depressed. Jesus joins them on the road, but they do not recognize him until after they invite him to stay for supper. Then they finally recognize him in the breaking of the bread - a symbol for the Eucharist. After that, they ran back to Jerusalem.

The Resurrection of Jesus made a difference to Cleopas and his companion. They shared their story of walking with Jesus and how they finally knew who he was. They were remembering his death, and then celebrating his presence. Some people think that the two of them were husband and wife, and that would make sense. Sr. Anna and I saw a large tapestry in a church in York, PA which depicted the two disciples from behind, and one of them could be seen as a woman. When the bishop of the Diocese of Harrisburg visited the parish, he questioned the pastor, then looked closely at the tapestry and said, "It could be.."

The Resurrection of Jesus made a difference to Peter and the Apostles. That is clear from the reading from the 1st reading from the Acts of the Apostles. It made a difference to Mary of Magdala, to Martha, her sister Mary and Lazarus. The Resurrection of Jesus made a difference to his own mother and the others gathered in Jerusalem.

The Scripture today asks us, "What difference does the Resurrection of Christ make in your life and mine?"

When Jesus walked with Mr. and Mrs. Cleopas, he lifted their depression. When he ate and drank with them, and the others, he took away their fear. When he sent the Holy Spirit as he had promised, he gave them the power to make a difference by who they were and what they did and said. He says the same words he spoke in last week's Gospel- the Gospel of John, "Peace be with you!"

In today's Gospel passage it says that Jesus calls the disciples witnesses. Peter in the 1st reading proclaims that he and the others with him are witnesses to the risen Christ. If you have ever watched any version of Law and Order, you know that being a witness to the truth can be dangerous. The evil you expose can cause you pain.

The Resurrection of Christ was the inspiration the disciples of Jesus needed to come out of their locked room, but the promise of the Holy Spirit was his only witness protection program. It would not preserve them from pain, but it would give their pain meaning and make it a part of the process of moving from death to life.

We are all on our own journey to Emmaus. And along the way there are moments of recognition that Jesus has been walking with us the whole way. But in between those moments, we have to walk those 7 miles of grief or pain or doubt or guilt or disappointment.

Ben Taylor is an African-American Friar in my Franciscan community who has lived in Harlem since 1968. His walk to Emmaus has included fighting for grants to establish programs for recovery from addiction, for moving people from homelessness and to help them to find a job. He is now legally blind and serves as a consultant in the organization [Project Create] which he had founded. He is still getting grants from the city, the state of NY and federal programs and he is still living with the people he serves. I am proud to call myself one of his companions on the journey.

My friend, Terry, has been in prison for almost 20 years. He will be released next year. His journey has included recovery from addiction, earning a BA degree while in prison, and a spiritual "walk to Emmaus" leading to a profound level of faith in God and peace in the midst of an extremely violent environment. He has met Jesus while in prison & I have met Christ in him, and through my walk with him. He is now preparing to become a Catholic after he is released.

Sr. Anna and I have walked our own road to Emmaus since 1995, when we began Bethany Ministries. We preach parish missions & retreats together and when I go to cover different parishes in the Diocese of Albany, Anna listens to my homily before I give it - and then makes "suggestions." She helped me put together what I am preaching today.

After Hurricane Irene washed through Schoharie County in 2011, our faith was tested. Like the couple who walked the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, we wondered what difference our faith could make and how we were going to continue the ministry we had been called to do.

After 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ years of living over 7 miles from each other while sharing a car, in 2014, we realized that we could not go back to the place that had been my home and our ministry center. Not 24 hours later, without knowing of our new awareness, Anna's landlord told her that an apartment was available for rent in the same building where she lived. I was moved in within two weeks, with the help of many companions on our journey, & our ministry continues to grow. We have met Jesus many times since the beginning of Bethany Ministries almost 20 years ago, but that was one of the most intense experiences.

What part of the journey are you on? Have you recognized the presence of Jesus along the way? Perhaps at a family gathering, or a reconciliation with a friend or a spouse, or a time when you are serving someone else's need. It does not happen every time, but if we believe that he is with us, even when we do not see or feel his presence, it will happen. And we don't have to wait until he comes in glory. He is with us here, and we can meet him in the Scripture, the Eucharist and each other. We can even meet him in the depth of our own hearts.

You and I will probably not be asked to die like Peter and most of the Apostles, but we are challenged to let the Resurrection of Christ make a difference in our lives. What that looks like will be different for each of us, but I believe it will follow the same pattern as the experience of others who have chosen to bear witness to the reality of Christ among us.

How can we allow the Resurrection to make a difference in our lives?

First we can remember how he loved us to his death, and realize that pain is not all there is, and death is not the end, even when we are in the midst of great pain or grief.

Second, we can celebrate the truth at the heart of this Eucharist, that pain and death are part of a process - a process we call the Paschal Mystery, the life, death and rising of Christ.

Finally, we can believe and experience that the Lord can bring good even from pain & death & sin, whether it is violent enough to get in the paper, or so personal that very few others know about it

As we continue our Emmaus walk with Jesus - as part of his witness protection program, - we may not feel like we meet him in the Eucharist every Sunday - even though we are gathered for the same reality the disciples experienced after their 7 mile walk - but this Mass is one more chance to meet Jesus in the breaking of the bread. One more opportunity to remember his love, to celebrate his presence and to renew our faith as we continue our walk.

♪♪ We remember how you loved us to your death,
And still we celebrate for you are with us here.
And we believe that we will see you when you come In your glory, Lord.
We remember, we celebrate, we believe. ♪♪