

Third Sunday of Easter – April 30, 2017
Sermon preached by the Rev. Daniel Vélez Rivera
Readings: Acts 2:14a,36-41, Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17, 1 Peter 1:17-23, Luke 24:13-35

At every Eucharist, Christians everywhere repeat the Emmaus story: we walk with friends and strangers going in and out of each other's faith journeys, we hear the Word of God and reflect on it, we break bread and share a Holy meal, we proclaim Christ's resurrection with these or similar words: "We remember his death, we proclaim his resurrection, we await his coming in glory", and finally we vow to be witnesses of Christ through our words and actions as we go out the doors.

In Luke's gospel, the first Eucharist celebration went more or less like I just described, including venturing into the world as witnesses, which is the setting for today's gospel story. Two disciples were returning home to Emmaus, a small-town close to Jerusalem. It was the third day after Jesus had died on the cross and the same day that the women disciples went to the tomb to perform the customary washing and anointing of a body, but they found it empty. As Cleopas and the other disciple walked and talked about the past three days on their way back home to Emmaus, a stranger walked alongside them, but they were so engrossed in their conversation that they didn't notice him. The stranger however, interrupted, and asked what was going on. Why were they in such deep conversation? Had something happened in Jerusalem? The two couldn't believe that this man hadn't heard about Jesus. When people that we love die, it is difficult to understand how others still go on with life, or sometimes even how the earth continues to spin. In short, they essentially told him an abbreviated Passion story from the one we heard on Palm Sunday plus the part that took place that same morning, when the women went to the tomb and learned that Jesus wasn't in it.

In this gospel version of the Resurrection story, only the group of women, and later Peter, went to the tomb of Jesus, so Cleopas and the other disciple heard how when the women reached the tomb the stone was rolled away and two strangers stood beside them. The Emmaus disciples told the stranger that the women saw two men in dazzling clothes; they described the two men to the stranger as angels. The women said that both angels wore dazzling clothes and announced that Jesus had risen, as Jesus said he would. When they went to tell the disciples, nobody believed them. Luke's gospel tells us that that the two disciples from Emmaus were perplexed, confused, and without any answers. All they knew was that their teacher's body was gone.

I will interject a parenthetical biblical commentary here for edification purposes regarding the Resurrection stories in the gospels because, just like the disciples on their way home to Emmaus, we too tend to conflate and sometimes confuse the details of the different gospel stories. This past Easter Sunday we heard from John's gospel not Luke's. In John's gospel only Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, who after realizing that Christ had risen from the dead ran to tell Simon Peter and one other disciple, not the whole group of followers. Mark's gospel has two resurrection proclamations or endings which took place after Mary Magdalene and two other women joined her to anoint the body

went to the tomb. They all saw the stone rolled back, the tomb empty, and a young man dressed in white sitting inside who told them to tell the others that he had risen, but they were so petrified that they didn't. Ending #1: Mary alone later told the others. Ending 2: Jesus appeared to Mary who told her to tell the others, but when she did, they didn't believe her. And last, but not least, Matthew's version where two women went to the tomb, yes Mary Magdalene is always present. There were guards keeping watch by the tomb, so they had witnesses. As the Mary's approached, there was a great earthquake that occurred when an angel descended, causing the tombstone to roll. The angel told them that Jesus had been raised and that they should tell the others, but Jesus appeared to them before they went to the other disciples.

In the end and most importantly, no matter how some of the details changed, these are the stories of Christ's resurrection; he died, he resurrected, someone told someone, and here we are celebrating his resurrection again. So, I invite you to read these stories on your own and if you have children make it a family event. If you don't have children and want to discuss this in a group, please attend the Easter forum on May 9th, where we will discuss this some more in the context of the sacrament of Holy Eucharist. It is important for every Christian to have his or her own resurrection story.

So, let's journey back again for a moment with the disciples and the stranger on the road to Emmaus. After hearing what the Emmaus disciples had to say, the stranger reprimanded them in a way, for not believing the women. Odd behavior coming from a stranger they had just met! Let's not forget however that Jesus had told all his followers that he would die, resurrect and ascend so why didn't they believe? Isn't it odd how it sometimes takes an "outsider" to help us remember truths that we've known our whole lives about ourselves or about our beliefs. Jesus told them what he had to say, and as he was about to move on, they invited him over for the night, a cultural tradition of that Middle Eastern period. It wasn't until the stranger blessed the food that they were sharing with him, that the disciples realized it was Jesus. In a flash, he vanished from their sight. He **was** the resurrected Christ! They too had to tell someone, so they put dinner away and went all the way back to Jerusalem to tell the others. They were overjoyed, they had seen, and so they believed!

As we break bread together, we will hear the Emmaus story repeated in a different and similar way. Here at St. Gabriel's we welcome friends and strangers to the table just like the two disciples did as they encountered the stranger on the Emmaus road and took him home. After being sent into the world to love and serve the Lord, I invite you to stick around for coffee hour and chat with a new church friend or someone you've known for a while. Sometimes it takes a stranger to open our eyes and souls. I invite you to try sharing your resurrection story today and listen to someone else's. Be a witness of Christ this week in words and actions because He is risen! Alleluia.