

Sermon
The Third Sunday of Easter
April 23rd, 2023
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott

Readings: [ACTS 2:14A, 36-41; PSALM 116:1-3, 10-17; 1 PETER 1:17-23; LUKE 24:13-35](#)

Bruce Epperly writes that “Resurrection moved the cells as well as the soul of Jesus, and the cells and souls of his followers. They went from the tomb and upper room out into the world, not always knowing where they were going, but trusting God’s Spirit to guide the way.”

I love this: moving cells and souls and trusting God’s Spirit to guide the way. We are all invited to let Resurrection - to let the Risen Christ on the move throughout all of creation - move our cells and souls, trusting God’s Spirit to guide the way!

We heard about this trust and movement of cells and souls last Sunday as Jesus breathed peace into the disciples’ fear as they huddled, grieving and fearful, in that upper room: enough peace, enough new life into them so that they could move their cells and souls out of that room - out of that place of fear and disconnection - and into the world to choose love and connection.

Jesus breathes peace into our fear, too, but that doesn’t mean that moving our cells and souls in the way of Jesus is easy! Sometimes our Christian tradition might leave us feeling that the Resurrection is meant to be a formula for unwavering hope so that our cells and souls move through this life with ease. It’s not. It infuses our cells and souls *with* hope, but there is space for all the feelings, in all the experiences.

Today our lectionary offers us the story of the road to Emmaus, from the Gospel of Luke. Notice: this is a story that is full of feelings! In it, we have another opportunity - another reminder - to consider what we do with our feelings - how we tend to them - on our journey through life.

The story starts with “Now that same day, two of them were going to village called Emmaus...”. This is after the women - Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them - have told the disciples and the others about their encounter at the empty tomb, after Peter had gone back to the tomb and then gone home, amazed but unclear about what has actually happened.

Two of them were going to a village called Emmaus. One of them is named: Cleopas. I’m grateful that this came up at our Thursday Eucharist (thank you, Mary!): Cleopas is named, but his companion is not. Centuries of preaching and art have assumed that this companion was male, but various scholars have suggested that Cleopas’s companion was his wife, Mary, who was at the foot of the cross. While it’s not possible to prove, this perspective infuses this story with a different feeling. Suspending our assumptions and judgements lets us feel the story in a different way.

Husband and wife are trudging toward home, toward the life they knew before Jesus. They are talking and discussing (might we even say bickering?) when a stranger joins them. They repeat the recent events - the crucifixion, the empty tomb, the testimony of the women that Jesus had risen - but their fear and anxiety and disappointment is palpable as they say: "We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel."

This statement is brimming with fear and disappointment. I think we all know this feeling, don't we? We had hoped...We had hoped our health would be better. We had hoped our careers and finances would be different. We had hoped our children would come to church. We had hoped we would stop having doubts by now...

Fear and anxiety and disappointment can so easily keep us from seeing what is right in front of our eyes! Cleopas and his companion were so anxious, so certain that Jesus was still dead, that the risen Christ appeared to them, walked with them, taught them all about the Hebrew scriptures and how Jesus was a new interpretation of that, and they didn't see him! Fear and anxiety and disappointment can paralyze us. It can make moving our cells and souls through life feel impossible. It can make us miss - be blind to - the opportunity to move our cells and souls with God's Spirit right beside us.

It is easy to feel that fears, worries, doubts, anxieties separate us from God. It's easy to believe that these feelings disappoint God, but this is where Jesus meets us. This is where Jesus walks with us, engages us. Loves us.

I've been reading and listening to Buddhist teacher, author and ordained nun Pema Chödrön this week. In her book "Start Where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living" she says:

"We generally interpret the world so heavily in terms of good and bad, happy and sad, nice and not nice that the world doesn't get a chance to speak for itself...[when we're not caught in our hope and fear]...we become mindful, awake and gentle with our hope and fear. We see them clearly with less bias, less judgment...When this happens, the world will speak for itself."

This is one of the things God is showing us in this story of the road to Emmaus. Luke's description of Cleopas and his companion invite us to be gentle with our fear. We don't have to interpret the world so heavily in terms of good/bad, happy/sad. We don't have to strive for fearlessness in order to move with God's Spirit. Opening our eyes is about making peace with the messy parts of life. It's all about being mindful, awake and gentle with all of life. Holding all of life gently, lightly, helps us to move with God's Spirit. And God's message to us in Jesus is an invitation to hear the world speaking *love*.

Cleopas and his companion, in spite of their fear and anxiety, still extend hospitality to the stranger. There is an important reminder here to choose connection even when - especially when - fear and anxiety blind us or weigh us down. When we break bread here together in community, we are invited to feel Jesus with us. We are invited to hear God's message of love made known in Jesus. We are invited to open our eyes to Jesus walking with us, meeting us in all our feelings, loving us with all our feelings. Feel that, taste it, when you come up for Communion this morning.

At our Thursday morning Eucharist with Lectio Divina, our intercessions include this:

God of grace and hope:

Help us to move from fear to trust.

Your grace surrounds and fills us:

Remind us that you provide all we need.

May God's grace surround and fill us this morning. May we move from fear to trust - not once, but over and over again - knowing that Jesus is with us in all our feelings. May our eyes be open to Jesus with us. May our cells and souls soak in love this morning, and may we go from here into the world seeing, hearing, and speaking that love, in Jesus name. Amen.