

Recognizing Resurrection
April 16, 2017, Easter Sunday
Jubilee Mennonite Church

Purpose: To relate the resurrection reality to the experience of being met by the risen Christ.

Message: We celebrate new life in the normalcy of Christ in the world made new. Even our ordinary activities are made new.

Scripture: Luke 24:13-35 (I will read); "John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10" "*Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6"; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; "Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43"

Feel free to select a complementary text, or, as the spirit leads, omit

Synopsis: The Emmaus story is not our typical Easter narrative. We don't have the usual characters and points of empty tombs and all the rest. But it is all the same an Easter story. The disciples have caught wind of something—they know not what—happening with Jesus, but where on their way to get on with life all the same. Yet they encounter the very one they were mourning along the way in the most ordinary of fashions.

Perhaps this is a better model for we who lack a tomb to which to run, a room to hide in, or all the rest. Our resurrections happen in the course of the ordinariness of life lived and the world encountered. How might we find hope in our meeting of God with us in OUR world, proclaiming God's life giving power alive even today?

Luke 24:13-35

¹³ Now on that same day two of them
were going to a village called Emmaus,
about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹
⁴ and talking with each other about all
these things that had happened.

¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing,
Jesus himself came near and went with them,
¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷ And he said to them,
"What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"
They stood still, looking sad.

¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him,
"Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem
who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹

⁹ He asked them, "What things?"

They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth,
who was a prophet mighty in deed
and word before God and all the people,
²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders
handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.

²¹ We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.
Yes, and besides all this,
it is now the third day since these things took place.

²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us.
They were at the tomb early this morning,
²³ and when they did not find his body there,
they came back and told us that they had indeed
seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.

²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb
and found it just as the women had said;
but they did not see him."

²⁵ Then he said to them,
"Oh, how foolish you are,
and how slow of heart to believe
all that the prophets have declared!

²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?"

²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on.

²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying,

"Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over."
So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

³¹ Then their eyes were opened,
and they recognized him;
and he vanished from their sight.

³² They said to each other,
"Were not our hearts burning within us
while he was talking to us on the road,
while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem;
and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴

They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed,
and he has appeared to Simon!"

³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road,
and how he had been made known to them
in the breaking of the bread.

This is not your usual Easter story. I apologize if you were hoping for the run to the tomb, the pronouncement of Christ's resurrection by angelic hosts, a weeping Mary and all the rest. This is Easter how we know it—the historic happening, the story of the risen Christ complete with amazed and bewildered disciples, who are at least more than a little bit apprehensive about what is going on around them. We know these stories and love them with their stark reality between the events of Friday and today, and their ability to so clearly inaugurate a new reality and new hope in all who would listen. Easter establishes a creedal reality that the disciples accept instantly, and are all at once transformed from doubting, quivering weaklings into strong apostles of the faith, preaching the Good News to all who would listen. At least that is how we read these stories. Christ is arisen, and the feast of glory can begin. Alleluia, Amen.

But this is not what is happening here. Despite our inclination not think of this as an Easter tale, it very much is. It happens on the very day of the resurrection. The travelers (we don't quite know who they are of the disciples) say as much, remarking about the mysterious disappearance just that morning, but they have not the slightest idea what to do with that information. So instead of racing along the road to the tomb, we find the disciples on the road to life more ordinary—walking toward Emmaus for some errand or another. On Friday their world as they knew it came to an end in the cruelest way possible. Now that the Sabbath has been observed and the peculiarities of the morning noted, they are getting on with life; sobered and somber to be sure, but not quite sure what to make of it all. So what else is there but to get on with the world as they knew it?

This might not be the triumphal Easter story that we are accustomed to, but I am not sure about you, it does feel rather authentic, doesn't it? As much as I hate to admit it, I find myself resonating at least as much with these disciples of the afternoon road than I do the ones of the early morning revelation, and not simply because I don't tend to be an early riser. Sometimes, the most human thing we can do with stupendous reality, those things and realities we just cannot understand or comprehend is to just keep moving on with life more ordinary. We might hold things in our hearts, ponder them as we go, but go on we still go as we adjust to our worlds turned upside down. It is why sometimes the most natural immediate response to grief is none at

all. Where we might even want to see wailing, mourning, and gnashing of teeth, we have the ordinary to do list of what needs to be done. Sometimes the most faithful response we have is to simply put one foot in front of the other and to just keep moving.

For the disciples on the road, theirs was not a resurrected reality; not yet at any rate. Their hopes of Jesus being the one for whom they have waited, the messiah, had been crushed by the powers that be. The glad, rich supper of the Messianic hope had come to naught. Jesus was to conquer all who stood in the way, establishing the reign in which no one would go hungry, where the rich would be turned away empty, every wound would be healed, and the reign of David would be re-established and the glory so long ago tarnished would come again. They were ready, they knew what was to come and how things were to happen in their minds. The meal of power and might that they had spread in their minds had gone profoundly sour. There was nothing to be done about it but to wait in the hope that the next Messiah would finally fulfill the promise of God's life giving action for God's people. They could not believe that God could possibly be at work in these miserable circumstances.

Not that Jesus holds that against them. It's not like that. Jesus comes and meets them where they are as they are. It is the basic human numb-response to trauma that the risen Christ comes and opens up the way of the kingdom as they walk along. It is the very one who knew nothing of what was *Really* going on through the eyes of the disciples that explains what was happening in their very midst. Sometimes, it is precisely this disjoint between the factual reality of a situation and the faithful vision of God's moving hand at work that we need the most to see the possibility of resurrection in the places we most need it. Reality in its harshness crushes us and convinces us that the story is over. But in Christ, in the resurrected reality, the story, even at its most painful, continues in the midst of the loving, life giving God working in the midst of the mess. I have said it before, and I need to say it again: the thing we hate most about God's resurrection is that it requires, on some level, death. Even for we who proclaim the risen Christ, it just rubs us the wrong way. But oh friends, Oh people of God—even at this price, the resurrection remains real. The risen Christ meets us even where we least expect him, and we are least able to recognize him, and brings life anew, turning the ordinary extraordinary time and again, bringing life out of even the most deadly of situations.

It is not until they sit down at the table, ordinary travelers sharing an ordinary meal that they were able to catch the glimpse of the extraordinary reality of what was going on, of the new creation that God has made in their midst. It is in the breaking of the bread that the blinders of their realistic minds were taken off and the resurrected reality of God's Kingdom realized came into focus. They did what they have done thousands of times, often in the company of their risen guest and honoured host. They came to the table, they came to the feast which had been set for them, and that made all the difference. They came to the table, and their mourning was turned into a feast of thanksgiving and rejoicing, knowing then what had been so long hidden from their eyes. For me these are words of hope, because I am not sure if I will ever see the stone rolled away from the tomb, the surreal event of the stupendous. But I have known the face of Christ in the ordinary passing of time, sharing of bread, cup, burden, and hope. I have seen enemies made friends, the seemingly dead rise again, and God's resurrection reality come into bloom, not through startling angels, but in the subtle rhythms of Christ walking alongside and bringing new life even where none was known to exist.

The reality of the resurrection and the truth that it holds is not first and foremost a reality of the grave and the declaration angels, or the complete comprehension of those who witness the sight. As important as it is, we are met in far more personal ways than even that. The resurrection reality is rather a reality of Jesus meeting his disciples, meeting us, in our ordinary lives, in the pit of their despair and the peak of joy, coming to them and walking with each of us. Christ is risen and the revealing the active, working, loving will of God in our world permeates our very reality, and is held by our every hope. God's will and God's mission could not be stopped by powers and principalities that did their worst and it cannot be stopped, will not be stopped by the miscomprehension of God's Kingdom by the children of God. The promise of Easter is the promise that even when we only see the powerlessness of reality, God is there creating life. Easter has come and the empty tomb is present even when the world claims that death consumes us, be it physical, psychological, emotional, or spiritual death. Even here we will be raised up and made new again. Resurrection reality is present even when our enemies triumph and God's kingdom seems only like a glimmering hope of fairy tale; still God is there. God is there not because we as disciples of Christ say the right things, respond the right way,

love with completeness and wholeness of heart, or even comprehend the wholeness that God's new creation can bring to us and our world. Rather God is there through the promise of Easter because God comes to us is love, reaches out to us, pulling us in through love, working in our daily lives, in this world and the next, walking with us, working in us and through us, creating the resurrected reality of the God's kingdom come to Earth each and every day. YHWH God is there because God in Christ has breached the gap, and reconciled all of humanity to himself forevermore. God is there because God is love, and nothing can separate us from that love, no matter what.

This is the feast of God's love and God's grace. Jesus came and made himself the bread of life which raises us up into a new reality, a new vision of what the world can be, a new understanding of the relationship between God and the Children of God. All are welcome to the feast that Jesus has inaugurated, that God invites us to. The simple bread of remembrance and cup of tears has been transformed into a new reality of hope and new understanding where there is plenty for all, where all can come and be satisfied, where the wolf and the lamb eat together in love. God has broken down every barrier, and has brought us together as the Body of Christ, inviting each one to take a seat at the table, feasting in grace and hope. This is resurrection that was revealed on that day in Emmaus, and it what we celebrate today. Come. Christ has arisen indeed. Christ walks with us and invites us to feast at the table of plenty. The feast is ready, and we shall be hungry no more. Alleluia!