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On the Road to Emmaus

They didn't recognise Him, for God kept them from it.

...

(When) He asked God's blessing on the food and then took a small loaf of bread and broke it and was passing it over to them, suddenly—it was as though their eyes were opened—they recognised him!

Luke 24:16, 30-31

19 April, 2020

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OPENING PRAYER

We greet you this morning our Loving Father, our hearts rejoicing in the memory of Christ who conquered death and is alive today, and our spirits unable to find equal joy with the news of a virulent virus rampaging across our communities, our towns and cities, our land and across the world.

We gather as people on a journey, following our Risen Christ into your presence. We believe in Your Sovereignty, yet doubts shadow our thoughts; we try and do good, yet we sin against you. We are imperfect humans, and yet you love us with a such great love!

As we enter into worship this morning, let your presence overshadow our doubts, refresh our spirit, strengthen our faith, that we may bask in your presence with joy, knowing that you are in control of Your world and our lives.

We pray with confidence, in the Name of our risen Christ. **AMEN**

HYMN **He walks me and He talks with me ...**

(click on the words in red above to play the hymn and sing along)

SCRIPTURE READING (Luke 24:13-48)

That same day, the day of Jesus' resurrection, two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles out of Jerusalem. As they walked along they were talking of Jesus' death, when suddenly Jesus Himself came along and joined them and began walking beside them. But **they didn't recognise Him, for God kept them from it.**

"You seem to be in deep discussion about something", he asked. "What are you so concerned about?". They stopped, sadness written across their faces. One of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about the terrible things that happened there last week."

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“What things?” Jesus asked.

“The things that happened to Jesus, the Man from Nazareth. He was a Prophet who did incredible miracles and was a mighty Teacher, highly regarded by both God and man. But the chief priests and our religious leaders arrested Him and handed Him over to the Roman government to be condemned to death, and they crucified Him. We thought He was the glorious Messiah, come to rescue Israel.

“And now, besides all this—which happened three days ago—some women from our group of His followers were at His tomb early this morning and came back with an amazing report that His body was missing, and that they had seen some angels there who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, Jesus’ body was gone, just as the women had said.”

Jesus said to them, “You are such foolish, foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures! Wasn’t it clearly predicted by the prophets that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering His time of glory?”

Jesus quoted them passage after passage from the writings of the prophets, beginning with Genesis and right through the Scriptures, explaining the passages and what they said about Himself.

By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus would have gone on, but they begged Him to stay the night with them, as it was getting late. So He went home with them. As they sat down to eat, He asked God’s blessing on the food and then took a small loaf of bread and broke it and was passing it over to them, when suddenly—it was as though their **eyes were opened**—they recognised Him! At that moment He disappeared! They began telling each other how their hearts had felt strangely warm as He talked with them and explained the Scriptures during

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the walk down the road. Within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem, where the eleven disciples and the other followers of Jesus greeted them with these words, "The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter!"

Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road and how they recognised Him as He was breaking the bread.

Just as they were narrating it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them, and greeted them. But the whole group was terribly frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost!

"Why are you frightened?" he asked. "Why do you doubt that it is really I? Look at my hands! Look at my feet! You can see that it is I, myself! Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost! Ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do!" As he spoke, He held out His hands for them to see the marks of the nails, and showed them the wounds in His feet.

Still they stood there undecided, filled with joy AND doubt.

Then he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and He ate it as they watched!

Then He said, "When I was with you before, don't you remember my telling you that everything written about me by Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must all come true?"

Then **He opened their minds** to understand at last these many Scriptures! He said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah must suffer and die and rise again from the dead on the third day; and that tHis message of salvation should be taken from Jerusalem to all the nations: There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me. You have seen these prophecies come true." (*emphasis in bold and italics mine*)

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS WORD.

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PRAYER

O Lord our God! When we cannot understand You, Your Word, nor Your work in this world, we are confused. Whom and What do we believe?

Forgive us our misunderstanding, and forgive us our disbelief, for we are weak in mind and spirit. Open YouR word to us, that we may hear, understand and obey Your teaching to us today, we pray and ask in the Name of our Risen Lord.

HYMN **Open our Eyes Lord, we Want to See Jesus**

(click on the words in red above to play the hymn and sing along)

MESSAGE

Believe it or not, Easter 2020 was no different from the first Easter! Our scripture passage today reveals a nation not only grieving Jesus' crucifixion, but confused by the news of His resurrection, unable to make sense of the events. The Feast of the Passover was now over, followed by earth shattering events (*literally!*), and later on the day of Jesus' resurrection, two disciples decide to return home to Emmaus. Interestingly, the subject of their conversation was "Jesus' death". We learn during their later conversation with Jesus, they had **heard** the amazing reports of some women "that His body was missing, that they had seen some angels there, who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, Jesus' body was gone, just as the women had said".

Reporting of news is always prejudiced, first because it is written or spoken by people who have point of view, both metaphorically and literally, where each eyewitness stands when an event takes place, gives them a unique perspective. Second, what they believe about the people involved in the incident, the people who orchestrated,

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and those who stood by and watched the event, shapes their world view and understanding. What we hear and read about the event, all come together to shape our understanding (and our confusion!). I agree to be guided, but I have yet to believe in unbiased news!

So, here are two people, to whom the news reports are conflicting and confusing. It doesn't make sense to their understanding of Jesus: His missing body, angels who said He is alive, our men ran out to see, confirming Jesus' missing body **just as the women said!**

There are several things to note in this narrative. First, the two disciples couldn't stop talking about what happened; talking about it was both cathartic, as well as trying to make sense of it by putting bits and pieces together.

It is always the case, when we are confused and seek answers, Jesus comes alongside, knowing that we cannot, between ourselves, solve the dilemma. Often we do not recognise Him, nor give Him credence

Next, note the strange phrase, **"they didn't recognise Him (Jesus), for God kept them from it."** God knows the human impulse of running with partial knowledge. He wants us to know the WHOLE TRUTH and NOTHING BUT THE WHOLE TRUTH, and this is evidenced in this narrative. In His great love for us, even when we are seeking earnestly for God, or for answers from Him, God spares us from partial knowledge, until such time as the WHOLE TRUTH is presented to us.

Having voiced their concerns (*things that happened to Jesus, the Man from Nazareth - His crucifixion, followed by reports of His missing body*), their fears (*the chief priests and our religious leaders arrested him and handed him over to the Roman government to be condemned to death, and they crucified him*), and their hopes (*We had thought he was the glorious Messiah and that he had come to rescue Israel*), Jesus walks them through the Word and

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Promises of God, what we know as the Older Testament, *beginning with the book of Genesis and going right on through the Scriptures, explaining what the passages meant and what they said about Himself.*

Jesus taught all the way, until they reach Emmaus, where *they begged Him to stay the night with them, as it was getting late.* It was during the evening meal, as Jesus broke and distributed bread, *when suddenly—it was as though their eyes were opened—they recognised Him.*

God reveals Himself through His Son Jesus, when we seek Him earnestly. These two disciples were most likely present at the last Passover meal Jesus had with his disciples, to know the symbolism of broken bread, done in memory of Jesus' broken body. God opens our eyes to see Him, when we follow in obedience to His word.

The third thing we notice is when the two from Emmaus run back to Jerusalem with news of their encounter with the risen Christ, *and how they had recognised Him as He was breaking the bread!*

In their excited exchange with the other disciples, Jesus appears before them and shows them His hands and His feet. *They stood there undecided, filled with joy AND doubt (emphasis mine).*

*Then He **opened their minds** to understand at last these many Scriptures,* by weaving the grand narrative of God's salvation through the death and resurrection of the Messiah, and that anyone who were mistaken in their belief and understanding of God (sin), were forgiven, if they believed in His true message!

God closes our mind to partial knowledge, He **opens our eyes** to first encounter the living Christ, who is the fulfilment of **ALL** Scripture, from Genesis through to the last of the prophets, and He **opens our minds** to accept His message of salvation.

This is what God does. But we, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, have to seek Him and get to know Him through His Word!

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Easter 2020 was just such a confusing time. *If there is a God, where is He? Can God be present through the trial of Coronavirus?* These are some of the questions being raised at this time. There is a minefield of news being circulated about this virus, not all of it trustworthy. How do we know what is right? Are the fact-checking reports to be believed? What about all the opinions of "experts", and last but not least, the pressure on decision makers by the media and by the political opposition?

Amidst this confusion, we can find answers in and through the person to Whom this world belongs. He will shield us and shelter us from partial knowledge, too vast for us to understand, and He promises peace and rest deep in our souls, which satisfies our need to know more!

AMEN.

PRAYER

Father! You know we cannot understand all things. Forgive us, and those who try, and pretend we do. Like the disciples, we are undecided, filled with joy AND doubt. But we are assured of Your grace, and are ready to grow in our relationship with You. Speak to us, Loving God! Continue your work of creation in us. Inspire us with Your Word, enlighten us with Your wisdom, and direct our every step, lest we miss and deviate from Your way. **AMEN**

HYMN **Because He lives, I can face tomorrow**

(click on the words in red above to play the hymn and sing along)

BENEDICTION

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Your journey through Lent and Easter was not in vain! Walk now in the shadow of Him who gave His life to death, conquered it, and invites you to eternal life with the Father.

Walk in boldness, as a beloved child of God

Walk in faith, knowing Christ walks with you.

Walk in peace, under the shelter of the Holy Spirit

AMEN.

LISTEN in silent meditation as we close this time of worship

Open my eyes that I may see

(click on the words in red above, to listen)