

Sunday, April 23, 2023 *“Eyes Open to See Jesus”*

I Peter 1:17-23 Luke 24:13-35

I spy with my little eye—something that is—green! How many of you have played this game with children maybe even while travelling? Maybe you have even played it because it was a teaching tool for colours or maybe to speak a different language: “Je vois avec mon petit oeil quelque chose qui est vert”. Then of course the person has to guess what was seen that was green. It is a game of observing and seeing, of sorting out what is not the colour mentioned or even which item is green. In the end it is not a game of detailed seeing but of random guessing which may bring laughter and a joyful moment.

But what might be seen or observed is dependent upon who is looking! There are many optical illusions which trick our eyes—you’ve seen these duck/rabbit, 2 faces or a vase but these are merely cognitive tests of what your eyes take in and cause your brain to respond in some form.

We know however that when an incident occurs people who witness it see many aspects of the event depending upon their perspective, their abilities and even whether they are focused on what was happening in the moment or even what they were doing. This is why it is so important for eye witnesses to step forward when an accident or incident occurs. Seeing something happen before your eyes often leads you to wonder what occurred and eventually how it affects you.

Our story from Luke 24 is the story of two friends who are on their way home from Jerusalem to Emmaus. This might not be very different as friends going back home from the city- but they are walking a 7 mile journey in the afternoon. One is named Cleopas and the other and the two men are talking about all the things that happened in Jerusalem involving a man named Jesus from Nazareth. They are sounding pretty upbeat and excited. Then a third person starts walking with them. They did not recognize the man even as he asked about what they were discussing. Jesus appeared to not know the story of this man who was a prophet who was handed over by the chief priests and leaders to be condemned to death. Cleopas tells the story with his friend and they are animated and excited to tell the third person that he was crucified and buried. One of them states, “we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel”. And it is with this statement that there is a moment of doubt and uncertainty about this man Jesus who died.

They continue to tell the story by what occurred next some women of the group had gone to the tomb early where he had been buried. But his body was not there. The women told them that they had seen angels who said he was alive. Some of the believers then went back to the tomb and found it as the women had said it would be but they did not see him. In this discussion, there is some wavering between believing and skepticism, certainty of the resurrected Saviour and doubt being declared.

Can you imagine this story being shared by these two disciples? They are unsure of the ending of the story about the prophet, redeemer, Jesus. They are wondering if the women really saw angels, and whether the tomb was empty. But they continue to walk and talk on their journey home.

How many of us have found ourselves in conversations that were similar? Just a general discussion about the events of the day- did you hear that they want to move the Ontario Science Centre onto the site of Ontario Place in Toronto. What do you think of that? What about all those new houses being built in Essex by Highway 3? No, you haven't seen them. It is worth the trip to see, just not sure who is going to live in them; not sure who can afford to! And of course for those of you who are Maple Leaf Fans—that game Thursday night—wow! They played really well.

The level of intimacy of these discussions is not really deep. The topics scratch the surface of the headlines of the day but what happens if someone goes a little deeper? Do you think that the housing development in Essex will be sufficient for what is to come in economic growth? Will the county be able to support the influx of workers set to come to the area with infrastructure- schools, homes, and support businesses? What occurs next is that the conversation either shifts or stops.

But in the case of these two friends walking home to Emmaus the stranger amongst them states, "O how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared. Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into His glory?" ten beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. The story is told from Moses to their present experience; from the time of the Exodus to the Promised Land; to the divided kingdoms, to Roman oppression and the prophecy of Isaiah coming to life with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But these two men just don't get who is with them. As they entered the village of Emmaus the stranger stops talking making it seem that he was continuing on into the village. But it was getting dark and so they urged him to stay with them.

The three went inside the house washed up a bit and after a 7 mile journey from the city they were hungry. So the friends found food in their house some bread and sat down to eat. It was then as Jesus took bread, blessed, broke and gave it to them that the blinders came off. They could see Jesus in the light of their lamps; they could see the nail prints in his hands; and they recognized them. When they recognized him he vanished from their sight. Their eyes were open to see who had been with them on their walking journey home.

They were filled with awe-shock-totally excited, filled with wonder—they were in the presence of Jesus of Nazareth- the one who rose from death and they didn't know it! This is the one whom God sent as His Son to be the redeemer saviour of all people and they talked about what had happened instead of seeing who they were talking with!

“Were not our hearts burning with us when he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” They questioned themselves as to what had happened on the way home and in their house. They probably were upset that they had Jesus to themselves and did not know it; they questioned their words and actions on the journey home. Now what?

What should they do? Would they be able to sleep knowing that Jesus was ‘the stranger’, the Messiah and the Risen One? Probably not! After finishing eating and drinking and resting, ‘within the hour’ they left home to go back to Jerusalem. They have just had a walk of about 2 ½ hours, rested and now decide to go back to Jerusalem! But what is different is that they are excited as they come to faith knowing that Jesus is alive. They are rejuvenated and ready to move, run and walk as fast as they can to get to the city. They are not sprinting by any means for 7 miles but they have a purpose to fulfill. They need to get to where the disciples are right away. They have Good News to tell! If they jog there it is still over 1 ½ to 2 hours to get back to Jerusalem. Upon arrival, they go immediately to where the 11 disciples are gathered and they tell their story. And especially how their eyes were opened when Jesus broke the bread. They believed- Jesus is alive!

Why is this story relevant today? As believers in Jesus we have a parallel opportunity to rediscover Christ's presence in our lives and to gain fresh understanding of God's transforming grace. We are given opportunities to form friendships that foster faith and support spiritual maturity. And this all comes down to the Spirit of God moving upon those who believe.

We might ask- why is it that some believe, and others do not? Martin Luther explained it well. He wrote, we cannot believe by our own reason or strength; it is by the Holy Spirit that one comes to believe. It is the Spirit which opens our eyes to seeing Christ; it is the Spirit which opens our hearts to receive; it is the Spirit which constantly challenges and changes lives.

Just think about the moment when these two people came to see Jesus for who he was and is. In the breaking of the bread; a moment of giving thanks to God. A time of worship and prayer. The setting for most persons to come to faith is Christian worship, which includes Scripture, proclamation, and sacrament. This is also where the faith is sustained and where Jesus continues to reveal himself through the Spirit. The Christian faith is born and nurtured where people share in worship through word, gesture, and earthly means, such as water, bread, wine, and through expressions of mutual care—the smile, shaking hands, possibly an embrace.

In this story there are action words- verbs describing movement. The two men “are going” (24:13), Jesus “came near and went with them” (24:15), they “came near” Emmaus (24:28), Jesus “walked ahead of them” (24:28), “he went in to stay with them” (24:29), “he vanished from their sight” (24:31), and “they got up and returned to Jerusalem” (24:33). Some of the verbs tell of movements made by Jesus; others tell of the two men. Either way, both Jesus and his followers are on the move. The moves being made have a purpose, that is to tell

the story of Jesus, to interpret it, to have a meal with Jesus and others, and to share it all with others. They ran to the city to tell others.

Having heard this story of faithful action, what does this mean for the church and specifically you as followers of Jesus in faith? Where is the Spirit leading you and what is your purpose now?

We are always being challenged to do something we know. But as we understand this story, the friends did not know Jesus until their eyes were open to see him. They were not ready to see the Risen Christ until they shared their experience and were ready to receive him. It was then the Spirit opened their eyes to see and their hearts to receive. And after physically recuperating then they moved to tell.

We often hear stories of people who respond to the Spirit with tears or laughter and then stop. Why? This is because it is only an emotional response for a short term. But when the Spirit acts and a spiritual response occurs- nothing can stop it! One just has to move! One can see and sense something new and exciting on the horizon. You can also know that you are forever changed.

When the 11 disciples heard what these two people had experienced they knew Jesus was alive. He would be with them again soon to give them further instructions for their tasks ahead. They knew Jesus and trusted him with their lives. And so should we.

As we continue to celebrate Easter and Christ's resurrection we need to open our eyes to see Jesus and be ready, renewed in faith and to be fed with the bread of life he offers. There is no illusions, no games but when we see Jesus for who He is, there is hope and life everlasting.

Let us pray.

God of grace and love, open our eyes and enable your Spirit to see and to believe. IN this moment we pray that your Spirit will move amongst us and call us to see with eyes wide open what Jesus did for us. May your Spirit move us so that we may receive Christ in faith. SILENCE.

Amen