

Sunday, April -26, 2020

Acts 2:14, 36-41 | Peter 1:17-23 | Luke 24:13-35

“On the Road Again”

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! We rejoice on this third Sunday of Easter because we are Christians and we need to lift up our hearts and minds to rejoicing in the gift of life that God gives to us. We might feel the stress of all that we hear in the news right now about COVID 19 and how the statistics change each day and how the curve is flatter than expected and how we need to focus on staying safe and staying home. But there is hope and this hope is found in Jesus who shows us new possibilities of what may be and can be through him and because of His death and resurrection!

How many of you remember the Warner Brothers, Looney Tunes cartoon with Spike the Bulldog and Chester the Terrier. Spike was a bulky grey bulldog with a brown boater hat, and red sweater. He also wore a perpetual scowl. Chester is a little dog full of pep and talked and bounced on either side of the bulldog non stop. He often asking Spike questions which the big dog ignored. In the cartoon, these two dogs were often seen walking down the street together and just talking. There were many contrasts between these two dogs who were the best of friends even though the bulldog didn't seem interested in what the little dog said. But in the end most of the time the dogs really did care about each other in spite of their differences and demeanors.

In Luke 24 we heard the story of two disciples- one named- Cleopas and the other unnamed walking from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus which is about 7 miles apart. As they were walking they talked with each other about what they had experienced that day. Then along comes a stranger who joins them on the road. The two friends do not know who he is but this man asks what they are talking about. The two friends stand still and look sad because they cannot believe that this stranger did not know the best story, the greatest news, the talk of town. Cleopas asks the stranger, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know what things that have taken place there in these days?” “What things? the stranger asks.

The two friends then answer, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth.” The stranger does not respond to this information and so the two friends both acting like little Chester the terrier start their discussion. They all begin their walking along the road and you can just imagine Cleopas on one side of the stranger and his close friend on the other. They each breathe and begin, “Well, this Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God

and the all people...” Then the other states, ‘our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.’ Then the first man states, “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” But, but now... now it is the third day since this took place.”

These two disciples are so excited it is like they are bouncing down the road as the trio walk along the road. The conversation continues as one of them states, “Anyway, some of our women friends went to the tomb really early this morning;” “... the tomb where Jesus’ body was buried after he died on the cross...” “And the women went there this morning and when they didn’t find his body, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.” “Imagine seeing angels and the angels spoke to them of Jesus being alive.” Then the disciple states, “Then some of our close friends went to the tomb and saw what the women had said but they didn’t see Jesus.”

Finally the stranger stops them and says, “You are foolish! Wasn’t it necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Continuing to walk along, the stranger then begins telling these two faithful followers the stories of Moses and the prophets and interprets everything about the promised Messiah which was in the scriptures. But they did not know who he was even yet!

As the trio approach Emmaus, the stranger lets on he is going further. But Cleopas and his friend invite him to stay with them, as it is getting dark and he would need a place to stay and find food to eat. So the stranger is welcomed into the house. Preparations for what they are going to eat are made and where he will sleep are done. They begin their resting time after the 7 mile journey home. But something interesting happens.

It is when they are sitting by the table that the man takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them. In this moment their eyes are opened to seeing who it is before them- they recognize him as Jesus, the Messiah. Soon after they realize who he is, he vanishes from their presence. They are in awe and realize what happened as they walked on the road together. Jesus had heard them tell their version of his death and resurrection and about the role of the Messiah.

After finish eating and freshening up a little, these two friends get ‘on the road again” and run to Jerusalem to where the 11 disciples are gathered together. They tell the disciples that Jesus appeared to them just as he had appeared to Simon Peter (1 Cor 15:5) and how their eyes were opened when they ate supper. Cleopas and the other disciple are so excited they could hardly contain themselves! We must realize that these disciples have walked 14 miles in

this one day—one way with Jesus on the road home to where it is safe and where they intended to stay. But on the road again soon after, they make great time for the 7 miles to Jerusalem and go where the disciples are where all are at risk and possibly afraid of authorities.

Where the disciples are gathered, they are excited and afraid at the same time. They are recounting the events of the day by the timeline of Jesus' appearances in order to make sense that Jesus was really alive. Jesus was really alive! So what did this mean for them?

From our reading in Acts 2, we learn that the disciples began telling the story of Jesus—the one who died and rose again as the promised Messiah of God. Those listening to Peter and the other apostles asked what they should do in hearing their testimony. Peter said “Repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus so that your sins will be forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit.” This promise Peter says is for everyone whom God calls. Because the disciples saw the risen Christ they had to tell others because they believed and saw the risen Christ. That day about 3000 people were baptized and became followers of Jesus. From there these people dedicated themselves to follow Jesus way of life and learned of his miracles and teachings. We who are living generations later still believe Jesus is alive because God is calling us to him and because what Jesus did is for all people- there is no limit on when we come to believe in Jesus- it is important that we do. Jesus promises us life eternal and right now there are many people who are living in fear because they do not know what will happen to their loved ones as death from COVID 19 is apparent. This is also true for people who do not believe and have been diagnosed with other illnesses. But one does not need to be ill or dying to look for Jesus. The men on the road were very much alive and their hearts and eyes were opened to realizing that Jesus had been in their midst . They did not know who he was but they ran to tell others of their experience. They could not wait.

Have you ever wondered what it might have been like to witness Jesus' resurrection like Mary and the disciples? There are people who are skeptical about what Christ's followers saw when he appeared to them but they were not there. History tells us these people saw something- someone they knew and loved was raised from death and they believed it was Jesus. This is what is foundational to our faith as Christians. God's children were promised a Messiah and this was Jesus whom God raised from death to new life. And through this resurrection transition from death to life a whole new faith filled religion for followers of Jesus the Christ. And what was brought to people was something which we continue to seek each day—hope. Hope beyond this life, beyond the tomb, and beyond human understanding. Yes there were skeptics and there will always be skeptics about Jesus' resurrection, but if we listen to the

stories of the disciples, and how from seeing Jesus alive, and then developing His church, we are renewed in faith. Through him our future is secured. We have the knowledge and understanding that Jesus shows us and we can believe and trust in his resurrection.

Death in its many forms looms large in our world right now because of COVID19. There are over 45000 cases in Canada, with 16300 people recovered and 2456 people who have died. Essential workers are striving to keep people alive but individuals are very weak and often family members cannot even see their loved ones before death. Open up the pages of every newspaper and you will see many obituary notices which state that our communities are grieving. But we know that once this covid19 clears we will have a new perspective on life and its many gifts. We will have newer priorities and there will be signs of resurrection all around us. Because people believe and have hope that better days will come when people will die not from a disease picked up from someone else's sneeze. And there are signs of resurrection when we realize that when people are challenged, they pick up their life and beat those challenges as they seek new life. Tom Stella writes in "CPR For the Soul" that there are many signs of resurrection:

When an alcoholic works the 12-Step program...

When an inner-city child graduates from college...

When an abused child becomes a responsible parent...

When an abused spouse says "no more" and means it...

When a couple in a troubled marriage begins counseling...

When a smile pops to the face of one long lost to depression...

When after a long winter, nature begins to bud and blossom...

When nations reduce rather than replenish their store of weapons...

The statements are examples and signs that resurrection is not just an historical event in the life of Jesus, but an ever-present dynamic in ourselves, in nature, and in the circumstances which so often overwhelm us." Many people are feeling overwhelmed because of social distance and isolation but there are others who know Jesus and are ok where they are. This is because even in this moment, Christ's Spirit is guiding us, helping us to cope when we are alone or even when we are together electronically. But one thing we need to remember is that there will come a day soon when we will need to leave the safety of our home and get on the road again of telling the good news of Jesus Christ. Just like the disciples who walked home to Emmaus with the stranger, they could have stayed safe at home sating on their experience with

the Risen Christ. But they did not. They went on the road again and told the disciples their story. How willing are you to do the same? Do you believe? Do you have faith strong enough to open your heart so that your fears and insecurities will allow the joy of resurrection hope to enter? What does it mean to you to be ready to go 'on the road –again'?

Let us pray:

Holy God of grace and love. We praise you for Jesus Christ and that he rose from death for each one of us. Help us to be renewed in faith and given the opportunity to share this story as we are able- whether through electronic ways of communication or when we are truly able to get 'on the road-again'. Help us O God to open our hearts to your love so that we might live eternally with hope. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.