

Sermon for 4-26-20
Gospel -- Luke 24:13-35
The Rev. Maggie Leidheiser-Stoddard
Christ Episcopal Church, Springfield OH

I miss you. All of you -- 8-o'clockers and 10-o'clockers; every Sunday people and once-a-month people and the folks who show up a few times a year. I miss seeing some of you arrive early and sit in your pew, enjoying silence and quiet prayer or maybe whisper-chatting with your neighbors; I miss seeing some of you walk hurriedly into the sanctuary as the first notes of the opening hymn ring out, occasionally making eye contact with me and grinning sheepishly (and I miss grinning back at you); and I miss seeing some of you arrive 2 or 20 minutes late, slinking in from the back, collecting your worship bulletin and settling down as quietly as you can, because the Body of Christ is not complete until you arrive.

I miss your beautiful faces; and believe me, every face -- including yours -- is beautiful when its wearer is feeling the Spirit stir within and around you, when your heart is strangely warmed by the presence of Jesus, who knows everything about you and loves you and claims you as his own. You are beautiful when you're basking in holiness; and I miss seeing that on Sunday morning.

I could list everything I miss about our "normal" Sunday mornings together, and this worship service would last until sometime tomorrow. So I won't do that, but I will share one more thing I miss, the thing I miss most of all: that precious moment when I get to offer you that little wafer, when I deliver to you what is already yours, indeed, what you already are -- the Body of Christ. That's my greatest privilege, and it humbles me every single time. I get to play a role in your, in our, communion with our Lord and Savior, the Lover of our Souls, the Redeemer of the World. Dear God, how I miss that!

Those feelings we're experiencing right now? The frustration at our utter lack of control, the stress of having to adapt so rapidly to new ways of doing things, the anxiety over the unknown, all the questions hanging over the coming days and weeks and months, the headaches, the tears, the fatigue, the clouds of sadness and anger that seem to have taken up permanent residence right over our heads? That's grief.

We are all grieving, whether we realize it or not. Grief isn't only for death, although death and grief are inseparable partners. Grief has other partners: shattered dreams, abandoned routines, broken relationships, freedoms curtailed, options lost, certainties

dismissed... altered realities. Changes we never asked for. Grief is the common denominator for all of us right now.

The walk to Emmaus is a walk through grief. Those two disciples, Cleopas and the other guy? They are grieving, they are hopelessly lost and confused. This is an Easter story; but not yet. Here in Luke's Gospel, Mary Magdalene and the other women have gone to the tomb with their spices, and found it empty. They've spoken with angels, who told them that Jesus has risen, but they haven't seen him. They've run to the 11, and told them everything, but the men don't believe them. Perhaps they can't. Who would believe such a thing, hearing it secondhand? It's just idle talk, the ravings of a bunch of overly emotional women who can't accept the reality that their beloved rabbi is dead, and their dreams of redemption have died with him.

Cleopas and the other guy have heard about the empty tomb and the quote-unquote "angels" who appeared to the women, but they know it can't be true. Body snatchers, maybe, seeking to further humiliate the false prophet from Nazareth even after his death... that's a possibility, but not resurrection. Death does not lead to new life. Death is a dead end! Jesus is dead, and our dreams are shattered, and all that's left for us now is grief.

You know the story -- Jesus meets them, Cleopas and the other guy -- the Risen Christ, the wounded and living Messiah, the Redeemer with nail holes in his hands and feet, he meets them on the road, he walks with them and talks with them and shares a meal with them; and it's only when he lifts that bread in his gentle hands and blesses it and breaks it (just as he was broken) and gives it to them (just as he gave himself) -- it's only then that they recognize him. It's only then that resurrection becomes reality. It's only then that they experience Easter.

So what about us? You and I are walking through grief, just like Cleopas and that other guy; but unlike those two, we don't have our holy meal. We aren't breaking and sharing the Bread of Heaven right now. This is Morning Prayer, not the Holy Eucharist, and we are far apart, not together at God's table! No wafers and no wine, no communion... and if that's what brought Easter to those two disciples, if that's what made resurrection real for them... where's our Good News?

If we put ourselves in this Scripture, if we enter into this story to discover our Good News, we have to stop about halfway through. We're not at Emmaus yet; we're still on the way. We're walking through grief with Cleopas and the other disciple, we haven't gotten to the table and the blessing and the glorious breaking of the bread. We can look

forward to those; and we will have them again, we will share the Bread of Heaven soon, but not yet. It's okay to be sad about that; it's okay to grieve.

But remember, remember! Jesus was there before the meal. Jesus was with them before the breaking of the bread. The risen Savior came to them in the midst of their grief, he walked with them and talked with them, he was their companion along the way. He was present in their sadness, he listened to their fears and worries, he shared his truth with them, and they didn't know it. They didn't realize that Christ was alive, they didn't know he was walking with them. They thought the One they called Lord was dead somewhere, they thought their hopes and dreams were broken artifacts of the past. They could not see through their grief to recognize Christ in their midst, and yet -- **he was there** -- just as he is here with us, right now.

It's a funny thing: no one knows who these two disciples are. Cleopas, we never hear his name outside of this one story; and of course we have no clue who the other guy is! They're not part of the 12. They're random disciples, with no identities. And no one knows where Emmaus is, either. There are six different sites in modern Israel that claim to be Emmaus, but no one really knows.

Maybe that's the point. Those two random disciples, walking through grief, headed who knows where? They're us. The road to Emmaus is our road. And no matter where we are, or what we grieve, Jesus meets us, right there, right here, right now.

Christ is with us; thanks be to God! Amen.