

Third Sunday of Easter April 26 2020

Luke 24:13-35

As the author of Luke illustrates in his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, the first Christians were known as followers of the Way. The Greek word is hodos- which means way, road, or journey. This makes sense as Jesus in the Gospel of John says that he is the Way- the hodos- the truth and the life. But there are other reasons this makes sense as well.

Our reading from Acts reminds us that the majority of these earliest followers of the Way were indeed travelers, people literally on a journey. Those three thousand who converted after Peter's sermon on that Pentecost Day were most likely people who had traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover festival from someplace else. The population of the city was normally around 50,000 but swelled to the many hundreds of thousands for this most important festival of the Jewish faith.

Most of these people, along with the disciples of Jesus themselves would hit the road, the hodos, to go back home. The spread of Christianity through the Roman Empire happened because Christians hit the road, the Way, to take the message of the Risen Christ to other people. So, one reason for the name people of the Way is literal, a people who traveled.

Another reason Christians were called people of the Way is that they often talk about their life of faith as a journey. It doesn't mean that we are literally travelling and walking everywhere (although I have seen a marked increase of walkers in my neighborhood!) But it does have the sense that the life of faith

takes you from one place and leaves you in another. That it is a deliberate movement from one state of being to another.

So, knowing this is how early Christians were talked about and how they understood themselves, how do we read our Gospel story today? What promise or good news do we hear in it?

We have two disciples, among those who had been present when the women came from the tomb that Easter morning to say Jesus' body was gone and angels had told them he had been raised. Two who had heard the reports of Peter and the other disciple who had gone to see for themselves and found the empty tomb but no Jesus.

These two disciples were on the road, the hodos, to Emmaus, probably their home, a good couple of hours away from Jerusalem. This is one reason why many think these disciples were a husband and wife. As they travel they discuss together what had happened, pushing and pulling at it from one direction then another. Trying to figure out what it means. It is on the road, the Way, and in the midst of their conversation about the events of that Easter morning that Jesus comes up on them. The text says that he draws near. I always envision him kind of catching up to them on the road, just walking that much faster than they were, as they distractedly talk and discuss with one another. Until, from behind, he asks the question, "What're you talking about?"

Amazed he hasn't heard the news, they share their story. Revealing in their own account their ambiguity towards these events. Not sure what to make of them. Jesus shakes his head and says, "You're having this conversation without thinking right! Let me show you how to think about it." Then he explains thoroughly to

them what it all means. How scripture points to the fact that being Messiah means suffering, death, and then resurrection.

By the time Jesus finishes, the couple have reached their destination. It is time to break from the journey. The text describes Jesus continuing down the road as they veer off to go home. As it is almost evening and further travel will be difficult and dangerous, they do a very Jesus-like thing and invite this stranger into their home to eat and rest. The invitation, literally, is to abide, dwell with them this night.

It is only when they sit down to eat and Jesus takes over the role of presider at the meal, breaking bread with them as he had done with so many people over his ministry, only then do they recognize who he is. Only then, in looking back and thinking about it, do they realize that their hearts have been burning, fired up in the presence of this man and his teaching.

Jesus draws near to them on the journey. Jesus is revealed to them after they hear scripture explained looking through the lens of Jesus and his ministry. Jesus is revealed to them after they follow in the way of Jesus and invite this stranger who has walked with them for a time to stop, rest, eat. To dwell with them. Only after they break bread together. Jesus draws near to them, on their journey.

But, wait a minute, you may ask. I don't know about you but I'm not traveling much of anywhere right now. And even if I did, I'm keeping 6 feet from folks. Fair enough, and good for you!, but keep this in mind.

While those early converts did literally travel the road home when Passover was done. While it was the journey of Paul and the exiles from the destruction of

Jerusalem in 70 CE that helped spread the followers of the Way throughout the Roman Empire. The more important journey was the one that they took each day, each week, as they began to follow in their own daily lives the Way of Jesus.

This is the promise to us. That as people of the Way, we will meet Jesus on the way, the journey. Sometimes, we see him coming and hopefully greet him with the same wild abandon of Peter when he recognizes Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and dives into the water to get to him quicker. Sometimes, Jesus sneaks up on us and our preoccupation with other things prevent us from seeing who he really is. But as we spend time in scripture- reading them through the lens of our experience with Jesus. As we follow in the way of Jesus and show hospitality to strangers, offer shelter to those in need, extend grace to all. As we break bread in fellowship- then we see Jesus before us. We see Jesus in the words of scripture that burn in our hearts. In the face of the stranger, the one in need. We see Jesus in the fellowship of human beings created in the image of God sharing food around the table.

Honestly, this part of being a follower of the Way kind of reminds me of Jedi training. For this journey is one that reshapes who we are, how we see the world, how we use the gifts God has given us. This journey starts when we encounter God's living Word- Jesus. Whether in the waters of baptism or the written and spoken Word of scripture. It continues as we live more and more in the way that Jesus shows us. A way filled with grace for others.

The good news is that this journey is for everyone. Peter puts it this way to the assembled crowd, "For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." And he points to

baptism as the way to receive this promise. In 1 Peter the author says that we are born anew through the living and enduring Word of God. The same Word that Peter proclaimed and through which the Holy Spirit called people. Made their hearts burn as they had been in the presence of the risen Christ.

The good news is Jesus calls all kinds of people to him. Look at the witness in scripture; Thieves and prostitutes. Temple authorities and the rich. Gentiles and Jews. Everyone is on Jesus' radar. Everyone might have the Messiah draw near to them on their journey and ask them, "What are you talking about?"

Jesus meets us on the way. Many of us aren't traveling very far physically, but from the conversations I have had, many of us are on a journey right now. One of rethinking what is most important to us, one that reshapes how we look at our neighbors, our selves, our purpose, our lives. And it is in this moment that Jesus meets us. Have you seen him? What questions is he asking you on the Way? Might it be worth listening for a time to God's Son and what he has to say about the road and the direction we are taking?

This is the good news. This promise of new life in Christ is for you, for your children, for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls. It does not matter what you have been, have said, have done. What matters is God's grace that forgives all of those things. What matters is God's love in Jesus that comes to us on the way, constantly, until that moment when we are able to see who it is that has walked with us. Who it is we have invited to abide with us. Who it is that breaks bread with us at table.

I pray that in the midst of our internal journeying in this season, we would all look for Jesus, hear his Words of grace, peace, and love, and follow where he leads us.