

Sermon for Sunday, April 26, 2020 - "Jesus in the Breaking"

Third Sunday of Easter - Online Service
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

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Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of our risen Savior Jesus.

I love this story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus and their story feels a lot like ours right now.

Granted, there are some details that don't fit. For one thing, the disciples are outside of their houses, traveling somewhere. Remember what that was like? My car now has amazing gas mileage - it gets 3 months to the gallon.

The disciples are also talking and discussing as they walk along. Which means there are two friends talking in-person - connecting without a phone or a screen! Oh, wouldn't that be wonderful.

Then a stranger comes up and they just walk and talk with him. Rather than lowering their mask covered faces and passing quickly, they have a conversation as they travel together. And then they share a meal. They sit at a table and break bread with people outside their immediate families.

So, some of the details in this story feel out of reach. Yet so much of it speaks to where we are living right now. The disciples are experiencing terrifying times. They're trying to make sense of it all. They've just seen Jesus crucified. The one they hoped would save their nation is dead and buried. They're hearing stories from the women that he is alive, but they can't wrap their heads around that.

As they walk away from Jerusalem, where Jesus was killed, they talk about all these things that have happened in much the same way that we're talking now about all these things - the outbreaks, the shortages, the press conferences, the orders from governors. They talk and try to understand but nothing makes sense. The path forward feels so uncertain, the road so long.

Then Jesus himself comes and walks alongside them, but they don't recognize him. In their grief and fear and confusion, they can't see Jesus for who he is. He asks, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" This stops them in their tracks. How can you not know what's been going on during these days? They tell this stranger all these things that have happened and then they speak one of the most heartbreaking lines in all of scripture, "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel". They'd had such bold hopes for themselves, their nation, their world, and it looks now as if those hopes will never be realized.

But we had hoped. This is where the disciples' story resonates so deeply with our own. We had hoped. We are living these days with so many unfulfilled hopes.

We had hoped to celebrate Easter with family.

We had hoped to go to prom and to graduation parties.

We had hoped to hold the new baby, to go on vacation, to lead a conference.

We had hoped for track season, for soccer season, for more time with the grandchildren, for the sixth grade musical.

This weekend at Good Shepherd we had hoped to remember Ben Blair with a night of music and song and to share in a memorial service for Grace Erickson. We had hoped for a baptism this week- end and for three of our youth to affirm their baptisms on Confirmation Sunday. We had hoped that the youth could lead another fun babysitting night for our young families next weekend and for St. Grubby's Day next Sunday. We had hoped to celebrate our graduating seniors in worship.

We had hoped.

As we carry these dashed hopes, Jesus walks alongside us as he walked with the disciples. Yet we, like them, don't always recognize Jesus, especially now. When we can't gather with the body of Christ, when we can't share in holy communion, it can be so hard to see that Jesus walks with us. As we live in this time of collective trauma and grief and fear, we struggle to see Jesus. We wonder - where is God in all these things that are happening?

This road to Emmaus story reveals that God is where God always is - in the midst of the suffering walking with us. God enters into our suffering and works new life from within it. This is what God does. This is why it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer. It's the pattern we see in all the scriptures. God brings life out of chaos in the beginning, God births a new nation formed from a time of slavery in Egypt, God makes a way in the wilderness to bring the people out of exile.

All the scriptures point to God bringing life out of suffering. All the scriptures point to Jesus - a Messiah who suffers to bring new life. It's hard to wrap our minds around this - a God who suffers. It's hard for the disciples on the road to Emmaus to understand this, even as Jesus walks with them, even as he interprets scripture for them.

Yet Jesus stays with the disciples, walking with them, teaching them, opening the scriptures to them. Then, finally they come to a house and sit down together for a meal. Jesus takes some bread and breaks it. "And in the moment of the breaking [the disciples] eyes are opened; and they see Jesus anew. In the moment of the breaking their eyes are opened and they realize it was Jesus who was with them all along." My friend Bishop Regina Hassanally preached those words on Good Friday and they have stayed with me ever since.

It is in the moment of the breaking that we can see Jesus - for Jesus is present in what is broken and Jesus is close to the brokenhearted. In his earthly ministry, Jesus spent his time with those who suffered deeply because of the brokenness of this world. He said, "Blessed are you who are poor and hungry, weeping and reviled." He fed those same people by taking a small amount of bread, blessing it and breaking it. Five thousand people were fed with that broken bread.

Before his death, he promised that we too would know him in broken bread. He took bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take and eat, this is my body, broken for you." In his life and death, Jesus was broken open - his heart, his life, his body broken open in love for this whole hurting world. And by his death and resurrection, Jesus has broken the power of sin, suffering and death. Those things can no longer separate us from God for Jesus has entered into them and

broken their hold over us. Jesus is present in every broken moment. Jesus works in broken things to feed and bless and heal and bring new life.

In the breaking, Jesus helps us to see him anew. So, let's pay attention to what we are seeing now in this moment of global breaking. How is Jesus being made known to us in this broken moment? In the breaking, Jesus opens our eyes to see that he has been with us on our long road all along. So, following where he leads, may our hearts also break open for this world God so loves. For it is from the depths of that breaking, at the very heart of our sorrow and fear, that Jesus comes alongside us. He uses our broken hearts to bless the world with good news - a healing message expressed in word and deed that God works to bring new life from broken hearts and broken dreams.

Dear People of God,

On this long road with the coronavirus, when the way ahead looks uncertain, as you try to make sense of all these things that are happening, this world's Risen Savior is with you. He's been with you all along.

Amen.