

May 7, 2017

TEXT: Luke 24:15–35

TITLE: An Ironic Turn of Events

By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there; they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, 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?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.*

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The word of the Lord.

Jesus suddenly appears and joins two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus, approximately seven miles west of Jerusalem, he queries, "What are you discussing...?" The two men, sad and discouraged, don't recognize Jesus, but

the one named Cleopas responds, “are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who doesn’t know the things that have taken place there?” isn’t it ironic that they didn’t recognize Jesus? It’s even more ironic that they would consider a stranger the one who welcomed strangers, the outcast, the forlorn, weary, wounded and weak.

Perhaps their conversation and discussion was so intense they didn’t really get a good look at who had joined them. Perhaps they had previously only witnessed Jesus from a distance and didn’t recognize him up close and personal. Perhaps they were blinded by the sun which would have been setting in the west that time of day and they couldn’t clearly see the Son walking with them. Perhaps, they were overcome and distracted by their grief, as they stated: “we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel!”

We all know something about hope that doesn’t manifest or come to fruition in our prescribed time frame. We hoped the prognosis received by a loved one would be rescinded and they would be healed. We hoped we would find employment to financially sustain our family, only to be offered a minimum wage. We hoped the friend living with addiction would get clean, but yet they have relapsed. We hoped we would be reconciled to that family member or friend, but years have gone by and still no resolution.

We hoped those in power would acknowledge the dark, devastating, demeaning and destructive policies and laws of the past and present ones in place or being proposed that will only benefit those who have and penalize those who have not, and that will further destroy God’s creation and sicken the most vulnerable, would instead work to ensure the US is a country where all are welcomed, embraced, celebrated, encouraged, cared for, challenged to do more, and have the tools and services needed to achieve.

We hoped by now all the “isms” that so many ascribe to and use as weapons of destruction to denigrate, decimate and divide would be no more. Yet and still, many are not judged by the content of their character, as Dr. King hoped; much less not judged at all, but accepted and loved as a member of the kingdom of God. We hoped that Christ’s death, burial, resurrection and ascension would mean that the cross is behind us and we can live and bask in the glory of Easter and the risen Savior.

Well, I’ve stopped by this morning to share that without the cross, the darkness of night, and the cold walls of entombment, there is no Easter sunrise or resurrection. Sometimes there are no ready answers or easy resolutions for all the things we hope for, but that doesn’t mean we give up. Instead we keep walking surrounded and led by the Holy Spirit; we keep praying, trusting that Jesus sits at the right hand of God and is making intercessions on our behalf; we keep waiting to hear the voice of God in the midst of confusion and loudness that

is so pervasive; we continue to have faith and believe the crosses in our lives will lead to the resurrection of that which was thought as dead.

That first Easter evening, the two disciples on their way to Emmaus were perplexed that the one they had followed and hoped to be the one to redeem Israel was dead. Yes, it was true the women reported that his tomb was empty, and other disciples had verified that—but that didn't really prove that Jesus was raised from the dead. And as the two walked away from Jerusalem, the epicenter of all that had taken place, a man, who seemed to not know all that had occurred shows up and walks with them. This man calls the two foolish and slow of heart, and then beginning with Moses, and all the prophets, he expounds upon and interprets all the things that had been said about the Messiah, the resurrected one in scripture.

This was an ironic turn of events indeed. A man who seemed to know nothing, in actuality knew everything; and better than they, he knew all the implications of what had occurred. While those who thought they knew everything, were actually blind and didn't see, much less comprehend. Was their inability to see Jesus, the risen savior walking with them a lack of faith in all they had heard, witnessed and received before Jesus' crucifixion?

Researcher and author, Brene Brown writes (Faith, Doubt and Inspiration, 2/9/2011):

“As I look around at the political and social struggle around us, I'm reminded of my own struggle to find/reclaim faith in my life. As a lover of all things certain, I wanted faith to work like an epidural; to numb the pain of vulnerability. As it turned out, my faith ended up being more like a midwife—a nurturing partner who leans into the discomfort with me and whispers “push” and “breathe.” Faith didn't make my life less vulnerable or comfortable; it simply offered to travel with me through the uncertainty.”

The ironic turn of events in our lives is: often at the place of greatest doubt and discomfort, is where we begin to trust, we begin to recognize the grace and steadfastness of God; we lean not unto our own understanding, but place all of our feeble hope, trust and belief in the risen Christ who walks with us, a nurturing partner who leans into our discomfort and helps us give birth to that which God has planted within us.

God never promised life would be easy, that we wouldn't face sickness or death. God never promised we wouldn't live through uncertain times and unstable leadership. God promised to be with us, to accompany us through our valley and hilltop experiences; to be our light in times of darkness and our shade when we are blinded by the light; to be our provider when we are in want; to be our comforter when we are in pain, perplexed or disheartened. God promised to never, ever leave or forsake us.

As night was about to fall and it seemed that Jesus was going on ahead, Cleopas and the other disciple invited him to stay with them. Jesus accompanied the two men to an ordinary house, where they sat at an ordinary table, and Jesus took an ordinary loaf of bread, blessed and broke it, and their eyes were opened. They recognized the resurrected Christ. In an ironic turn of events, those who just hours before were “slow of heart, “hearts now burned within them” and they recognized the fulfillment of scripture and all their hopes in their presence. It’s ironic that “God chooses what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chooses what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chooses what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are....” (1 Corinthians 1:27, 28)

Beloved, be encouraged and have faith, as we travel the roads to Emmaus in our lives, we may be blinded by ironic turns of events, situations, political stances and posturing, remember that’s what got Jesus killed! Be comforted in knowing weeping may endure for a night, but God is with us whispering “push forward”, “breathe deeply.” May our hearts burn within as we run to share the good news, the Son has risen. Amen.