

4-26-20

He Is Here

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Scripture reference: Luke 24:13-35

“When we are walking, doubtful and dreading...  
Blinded by sadness, slowness of heart...”

This is where the travelers were today in our scripture reading. This was their state of mind. They were heading down the road to Emmaus having just left Jerusalem and all the “stuff” that went on with the handing over, the sentencing, and the crucifixion of Christ. And if that on its own wasn’t enough, the tomb where Jesus had been laid was empty and there was no body anywhere and no Jesus - at least as far as they had been told and as much as they could see... Who could blame them for feeling the way they did? They were sad, their hearts were heavy, and they were so very unsure of what it all meant, of what the future would hold.

This is where many of us are right now. In the midst of this viral pandemic, our journeys have taken a bit of a turn. We are walking this road, we are on this journey to tomorrow, to what’s next, and many of us are doubtful about so many things - not the least of which is our concern, our doubt, about where Jesus might be in all of this, in the struggles that so many are facing. And along with that doubt - almost inseparable from doubt - there is so much dread. So much dread about what is happening, or what might happen, with this virus that is changing, not only our own lives, but the entire world... Many are fearful, are dreading, what the future might hold - How much longer can we handle staying away from those we love? What about unemployment, evictions from apartments, foreclosures on homes, empty plates at the dinner table - and I know that sounds ominous and maybe to some of you a little “over the top”, exaggerated; but to others, those are REAL questions, REAL concerns, dreadful thoughts about what might lay ahead on this road we are travelling.

Look around you right now, as we are on this journey you will see people like these two on the road to Emmaus. As the travellers in our scripture reading stood with their faces downcast, people all around us today stand the same way. There is a sadness that has found us on this journey. And that sadness consumes us. We miss our families and our friends in this time of “safer-at-home” and “social distancing”. There was a prayer request going around on social media that speaks to this “social distancing” so well. It goes like this: “Pray for the huggers. We are not okay. Social distancing is not easy for us.” The request was specifically for the huggers of the world, but so fitting for so many as we practice social distancing. So this is hard and it makes us sad that we cannot hug each other, we can’t hold each other... And it’s not just that which is hard and makes us sad. People are losing loved ones

who are succumbing to this illness. Our hearts feel the weight of our own losses - loss of the physical reassurance that we find in a hug, and loss of someone we knew or loved who did not survive this illness - and everything just slows down. It's hard to keep moving to keep looking ahead with any kind of excitement or joy - we can't see beyond today, maybe tomorrow, but not very far - we are blinded by the sadness that has been spreading along with the doubt and the dread that has come with this virus, and we just... slow.... down.

We feel so alone sometimes - everything seems to have been taken away - who knew we were such social creatures? Okay, a lot of people knew that, but how many of us really understood that until the "social" was taken away from us? This is the time, this time we feel ourselves slowing down, this time we start feeling like we are so alone, this is the time to REALLY take a look around. Some of you who are listening to my words today are the only human beings in your home, but I contend that you are not alone. I contend that you have NEVER been alone...

I think about times when I was maybe 3, 4, 5 years old and Dad was at work, Mom was busy, and my brothers and sister wanted nothing to do with me... I remember playing by myself, having a tea party, talking to my imaginary friends and having a great time. I remember being a little older - say middle school/early high school age - having a hard time figuring out where I fit with all these other people, and spending time with characters in the books I was reading, or "talking" to - I don't know who - as I wrote in a diary or journal.

I thought about those times in my childhood and then as my thoughts continued to wander toward my adult years, I thought about conversations with friends - some of them silent conversations - and then I got sidetracked with those thoughts about silent conversations as they kind of mixed together with my thoughts about imaginary tea party friends, and I found myself thinking about the movie "Harvey" starring Jimmy Stewart. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the film, Jimmy Stewart portrays a middle-aged, amiable though somewhat eccentric man, named Elwood P. Dowd. Elwood's best friend is an invisible 6 foot 3.5 inch rabbit named Harvey. Not only do the people in Elwood's life accept the existence of Harvey, some of them begin to see him themselves. There is much more to the movie, but this is the important part for today. Elwood was not alone - ever. And Elwood spent a good deal of time introducing "Harvey" to those he met and encouraging their friendship with Harvey so they would never be alone. I have seen that same behavior from people who know Christ. They feel His presence, they know He is there, and they introduce Him to others... Kind of interesting isn't it? Whether or not you can make the same leap between Elwood helping people know Harvey and Christians helping people

know Jesus isn't that important; the important thing in all of this is to recognize, and truly know, that WE are not alone.

The third verse in the song we just sang begins with the words " 'Lo, I am with you,' Jesus has spoken." I implore you to look around and see that those words are true... Jesus is with us having tea when we are 3, 4, 5, or 80 years old; going on adventures with us in literature; listening to us as we "talk" in our diaries or journals, and sitting beside us - perhaps invisibly as a 6 foot 3.5 inch rabbit. The point is, we don't always see, we don't always recognize that we are not alone, that He is here.

Verse 31 in our reading today says: "Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight." Again, they could not see Jesus, but this time they believed, they knew he was still with them.

The two men on the road to Emmaus didn't see that Jesus with them, but he was there. We may not always see Jesus with us, but he is here. He is here in the hearts of our neighbors, our friends, our families, and the guy two blocks down on the other side of the street who ALWAYS smiles and waves as you pass by... I am reminded of a message I offered about a year ago now. A message that was inspired by my then two year old granddaughter Abigail who saw the tiny cross that hangs on my necklace and excitedly proclaimed: "Grandma, you have a little Jesus!" At that time, I also used a story about how Mother Teresa bowed to any she met, and upon inquiry, explained that she wasn't bowing to the person, but was bowing to the Jesus inside each person. At that time, I spoke of the fact that Jesus is inside each of us, that we all have a little Jesus. Today, I take those same words of wisdom from a two year old: "... you have a little Jesus." and I encourage you to see the Jesus not only IN you , but also the Jesus that is WITH you. The two who travelled the road to Emmaus that day were in the company of Jesus and they didn't recognize that fact. Each one of us is in the company of Jesus. See Him. See the Jesus that is walking with you on this journey; the Jesus that sits in the empty chair across the table, in the card you got in the mail, the neighbor kids raking your lawn, the phone call, the meal dropped off, the smile and wave from a stranger. He's Here.

"Christ our companion, hope for the journey..." He is Here.

AMEN