

“Open My Eyes That I May See”

Let us pray: Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see the resurrected Jesus. Open our eyes. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

- I. Introduction. This Sunday and last, the Gospels depicted several resurrection appearances of Jesus. In this week's gospel, he appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. We know little of these two – just that one is named Cleophas and that they are in a state of grief. How much weight are we to give to the resurrection in our Christian belief system? In other words, how important is it that we believe that Jesus rose from the dead? There are some scholars who suggest that the resurrection grew out of the imagination of the early disciples and the wish of the early church to establish itself. My own response is that the actual resurrection is a cornerstone Christian belief, without which we have a watered down, rather bland form of Christianity -- a Christianity that doesn't have much vitality or relevance.

Short of the resurrection, Jesus loses his divinity and becomes more like a good teacher or a prophet, but certainly not the Son of God. In fact, many of Jesus' self descriptions would become inaccurate: “I am the resurrection and the life;” “I am the way, the truth and the life.” In fact in *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis writes:

“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher, he'd either be a lunatic – on a level with a man who says he's a poached egg– or else he'd be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God, or else a madman, or something worse. . . . But don't let us come up with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He hasn't left that open to us. He didn't intend to.”

- II. Resurrection appearances on many levels. Having affirmed the historical trustworthiness of the resurrected Jesus, let me go on to say that I continue to see and experience the resurrection and see the resurrected Jesus in many ways at many different times. One of those times occurred this week when I took a meal to a family in our parish and spent some time with them and their new daughter Abigail. She is absolutely beautiful, and I fell in love with her. She reflected to me the presence of new life in our parish and in this family. I believe that all appearances of new life always contain the prototype of the Resurrection of Christ. Then yesterday I again saw new life when

I met with 9-year old Adam Johnston and his parents to prepare for his baptism today. He himself has asked to be baptized. Baptism for us, as Adam and I discussed, always signifies new life in Christ, spiritual rebirth – a resurrection.

- II. Resurrection encounter: We human beings yearn to encounter others, especially in new, creative, and often resurrection places. We are hungry for meaningful encounters. At the same time that we yearn to encounter others, we live in a world where our gadgets, our mobility, and the demands on our time can make authentic encounters difficult. As a people we've never been more busy and yet we've never felt so lonely.

Can you imagine what it must have felt like to actually have encountered the risen Jesus Christ? What an experience! These two disciples had no doubt known about and perhaps even witnessed Jesus' crucifixion. Very possibly they were so overwhelmed by grief that they had decided to leave Jerusalem, the place where Jesus had been killed, and had walked seven miles west to Emmaus. All they talked about on that journey was the death of Jesus and the reports from earlier that day about the empty tomb. Then an odd thing happened. Jesus approached the disciples and asked if he can walk with them. They agreed, but they didn't know who He was – they didn't recognize Jesus. Probably in part because Jesus' resurrected body was different from his body when they had last seen Him. And the three of them were walking west to Emmaus with the setting sun in their eyes. But I think that the main reason they didn't recognize Jesus was because at that time, they had limited understanding of who He really was. Their faith in Him had not yet been fully formed. They were his disciples, but they didn't yet really comprehend his mission. So they didn't expect to see Him on that road.

What did Jesus do on the road to Emmaus? He walked with them, listened to their grief, their disappointment, and their confusion. Things had turned out so differently than they had imagined and hoped. So differently. So first Jesus connected with them because He loved them. Then he taught them – beginning with Moses. He taught them “all things about Himself” and their minds were engaged. Their encounter with Jesus had begun. So often our encounters begin with others who are just walking with us, loving us, and then sharing their wisdom with us.

Then they reached Emmaus and Jesus began to walk on – to leave them. But they asked Him, no they urged Him, and Luke tells us that they urged him strongly, to “Stay with us for evening is nigh.” They extended hospitality. This is very important. It is at our invitation that Jesus comes to us. He never forces Himself upon us. He really would have walked away if these two disciples had not invited Him to stay with them. We may not always understand who Jesus is, but it is our invitation for Him to

walk with us on our life's journey that keeps our encounter with Him alive and it is in the encounter that Jesus is revealed to us.

- IV. Revelation: For some of us, encounter may be easier than revelation. Revelation can come with a jolt – it can burst right in and shake us up. That's what happened to Cleopas and his unnamed companion. In the meal they began to eat together. Jesus "took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them." And their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him. . . they recognized Him in the breaking of the bread. Some believe that this verse refers to the Eucharist – that was my first impression. But as I reflected on this passage, I came to see that revelation for the disciples was associated with their close fellowship.

This revelation hadn't occurred in a church – the temple was back in Jerusalem. They had not gone to the temple with their grief. Instead, they were in a private home. So often it is in our homes where we can experience powerful, close relationships. We can see one another more fully, more completely as the disciples did when they sat across the table from Jesus. Perhaps they recognized Him because of His hands – the hands which had broken bread and fed the 5,000. Or perhaps it was his smile, or his eyes – their depth, their communicating that He knew them. Perhaps from the look on His face or from something that he said, they knew they were loved.

That knowing – that we are loved and are lovable – is part of what we yearn for in our encounters. It is a knowing that we see in the eyes of others and that they see in ours. This kind of "knowing" Jesus is more than a head thing, more than an intellectual knowing. Instead it is the deep experience, on all levels, of knowing that we are loved by Jesus Christ. And because of His death and His resurrection, we know that nothing, nothing, not the cross, not death, not broken dreams, can separate us from that love. That is what the disciples knew – that is what was revealed to them.

- V. What they did next is exciting. It is pure excitement. The "same hour" they got up and returned to Jerusalem to tell the apostles what had happened. It was dark, unsafe on that road and seven miles back to Jerusalem. But in their excitement they had to tell others! What had happened was so wonderful – they just couldn't keep it to themselves. They had to share it. That's why we're together here at Ascension – to share the Easter story with one another. But that's another sermon for another Sunday. Today the gospel has focused us on personally encountering the resurrected Jesus and on being able to discern when we are in his presence. Thanks be to God. Our encounters with the resurrected Jesus never, never end. *Amen.*