

Walking with Jesus on the Road to Emmaus

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Luke 24:13-35

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Growing up my family took a summer trip out to Rapid City, SD. We experienced all of the joys of being in the Black Hills we saw Mount Rushmore and toured the Badlands and explored Crystal Cave. For me one of the highlights of going to the Black Hills was going down to Hot Springs SD South of Rapid City. The town was called Hot Springs because was famous for its large municipal pool that was fed by Hot Springs. It was my first experience of a natural hot spring and all of the healing and restorative properties that come from a mineral spring. Many people are drawn towards such healing waters in pursuit of restorative energy. When life's aches, pains and struggles become overwhelming one may seek out a spa retreat as a getaway. Many find nature in general as a wonderful way to find healing and rebalance in life.

These happy memories of Rapid City and Hot Springs SD came rushing back this week when I realized that the word Emmaus actually means Hot Springs. I started wondering maybe this story is not so much based in history as it is a story of how to seek and find restoration. We have these two unknown disciples, Cleopas and his anonymous companion, leaving the chaos of Jerusalem and walking 7 miles to Emmaus. Along the way we have several elements raised up that step by step bring healing to the two disciples. Their need for this healing comes from Cleopas' own words as he sadly tells the stranger "We had hoped that Jesus was going to be the redeemer of Israel."

We can relate to their need to get away from the chaos and clear their heads as they walk. They are in nature, walking and reflecting on all they have witnessed. Taking a walk or sitting in a quiet space in nature to meditate and to ponder can help us bring order to our own chaos. Some of my fondest memories of South Dakota have also been around those quiet moments up on a hill overlooking the undisturbed scenery of nature. Perhaps watching a thunderstorm come in or listening to the whispering sounds of the air going through the pine trees. Vivid memories that I hold on to today that help keep me spiritually grounded.

Another element that comes up in the story is the rehashing of the memories of what all the two disciples had experienced. The text tells us that they were talking along the way debating and reflecting on these things but when the stranger shows up, we get a synopsis of what all they were talking about. We do this. When is chaotic or traumatizing we may find ourselves reliving those stories over and over again in our heads trying to make sense of it. These two disciples are doing just that trying to make sense of what they believed about Jesus vs. what they saw.

But sometimes get just getting away or ruminating on those stories trying to find harmonizing theme is not enough. Sometimes we need the outside perspective of a stranger. Someone who does not have a vested interest in the way you understand things and can give you a broader, wider perspective on another way of viewing what has just happened. For many of us we may find ourselves resistant towards the idea of engaging in conversation with strangers. You get on the airplane and the last thing you want to do is to be trapped next to somebody you don't want to talk to so you find excuses to stick your nose in a book or to put on some

headphones so you can ignore the person next to you. Perhaps as the book of Hebrew says we may find ourselves entertaining angels unaware. Perhaps God brings the stranger into our world to shift our perspective to open our minds in new ways.

Being the extrovert that I am I tend to enjoy engaging in conversation with people I don't know. I have found that it helps me gain a greater appreciation and understanding of others and the world. That was one of my goals for having these interfaith dinners these last several months. I believe that meeting and hearing other people's perspectives on faith and spirituality can be enlightening for our own spiritual walk. For those who have attended these dinners I believe we've all experienced it to some greater or lesser degree. Hearing different ways of experiencing faith or understanding God has been encouraging to me and to others. Finding common ground with people who worship differently or speak a different language can help breakdown our misconceptions and false stereotypes.

In today's reading we see the stranger open the scriptures in new and profound ways to help the disciples integrate the truth that Jesus truly was the Messiah and that his death was not the end of the story. Cleopas and his companion had to let go of the idea that Jesus was to be a military liberator of Israel would be open to a new profound way of understanding Jesus.

The next place of healing that comes when they stop for the night and must decide to offer true hospitality and care for the stranger. They move beyond just debate and arguing, to true fellowship with the stranger. Cleopas and his friend felt a bond with the stranger but didn't know how to articulate it

until they sat down and shared a meal together. It was in the breaking of the bread that their eyes were made to see.

Today's story is more than a onetime experience but a message of healing we can all seek after. The road to Emmaus moves us from the chaos and destruction of this world to a place of healing and restoration. The Hot springs are healing waters of life that bubble up and offer us healing minerals for our souls.

This story helps us to consider different ways of walking that journey of healing that Cleopas and his unnamed friend experience. Being in nature on this Earth Day weekend we celebrate the beauty of all that is around us and remember the words from Romans 8 that all of creation cries out for the healing of God.

Hearing one another's stories of life expands our perspective of God and the many ways God is at work in the world. It can help us see the world in a different way, showing us new pathways forward in our own lives.

Finally the vulnerability of inviting others into our most intimate times of life is truly eye opening. When we drop our guard and offer true hospitality and care for the other do we realize that Jesus has been here the whole-time longing to offer us healing and love.

Such experiences of the heart cannot be contained or kept to ourselves.

They must be shared in the community. A living testimony of Christ alive in our midst reveals that God's kingdom is truly here.

Third Sunday of Easter

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. Luke 24:13

Seven Miles

In the beginning, we were in complete chaos.
Seven miles between hell and hot springs,
seven movements of re-creation:

The Spark.
The urge to go into the wild.

The Water.
To be baptized in the mist
where sea and sky revel in their reunification.

The Ground.
To put down roots and exchange air with trees.

The Heavens.
To glimpse the transfiguration of the divine
in the celestial dance.

The Wake.
To howl the pain of hope cut down, while startled birds take flight.

The Sojourner.
To find the stranger and recognize our likeness.
To meet in the stories of this pastoral confessional
where words breathe life into clay,
and holy winds sing chaos into order.

The Stay.
To spend one Earth Day in the presence of eternity.
To be remade.
To be ready to return.