

The Path

Sermon, Third Sunday of Easter, May 8, 2011

Grace Episcopal Church, Elmira, NY

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Acts 2:14a, 36-41, Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17, 1 Peter 1:17-23, Luke 24:13-35

Today's Gospel is the story of the Road to Emmaus. This is a very well-known story, very familiar to us. The two disciples are discussing recent events in Jerusalem. They are bewildered and confused. There are rumors that Jesus is alive, but they haven't seen him. They are disappointed; they "hoped he was the one to redeem Israel." Then a person joins them who discusses the prophecies concerning the Messiah. When they reach their destination, they invite him to join them. It is only when he breaks the bread at the table that they recognize that this is Jesus.

There are several things in this story that I would like to mention. The first is the disappointment that the disciples were experiencing. This was not only the death of a friend, but it was the dashing of their hopes that "he was the one to redeem Israel." There is much in Scripture that we don't know for sure, that we can only speculate about. So I invite you to join me in some speculation. Remember the revolt of the Maccabees? About 150 years before the time of Jesus, Judas Maccabeus led his followers in a revolt against the Roman occupation. Out of this revolt arose the Zealots, a clandestine rebel party intended to bring down the Roman occupation. These were fugitive freedom fighters who were looking for a leader, the Messiah, who would demonstrate that God was on the side of Israel and vanquish their enemies. One group within the Zealots were the Sicarii, assassins who carried small daggers or *sicari*. It is possible that Iscariot is a corruption of Sicarii and that Judas was a Zealot. There is the theory that with his betrayal of Jesus he was trying to force Jesus' hand, to put him in a position where he would be compelled to reveal his power and crush the occupying Romans.¹

Looked at from a human point of view, maybe he wasn't so stupid. But things didn't work out the way he had hoped. As it was, Jesus went to his death "despised and rejected; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, he opened not his mouth."² Imagine the disappointment of those who were looking for a conquering hero.

Now look at this from God's point of view. (Not that we really know what that is.) Kicking the Romans out of Israel might have lasted for a few years, but a small country sitting on top of the major trade routes in the known world would inevitably be taken over by some bigger power. This was not about the temporal governance of Israel. It was about redeeming a sinful and wayward people – all of us. Look at what happened as a result of Jesus' mission on earth. In spite of all its frailties, the Christian movement is world wide and still going strong 2000 years after Jesus' time on earth. Now that's a mission fulfilled.

¹ for more on this topic go to <http://latter-rain.com/ltrain/zeal.htm>

² Isaiah 53: 3, 7

Let's look some more at the Gospel story. We are all on a journey through life. We all walk a road, a Path. Sometimes we think we know where we are going, and sometimes the Path seems purposeless; we are blundering around in the dark, in the murk. One of the most important things this story teaches us is that Jesus is with us no matter how difficult, how murky, how unsure the whole process seems. So often we don't recognize him. Sometimes we do, sometimes he is present in the form of another person. But he is right here with us – if we can only remember to look.

Life brings us disappointments. We have hopes and dreams and plans that somehow just don't seem to work out. Some of our greatest learning comes from these disappointments. It is how we handle them, how we reconcile them, how we let go of our own desires that brings the spiritual growth – which after all is what the Path is all about anyway.

It is all up to us. Are we going to recognize Jesus beside us? Are we going to be able to let go of our own plans, hopes and dreams, and allow the Will of God to guide us? Are we going to take the time to really listen? We avoid learning by doggedly clinging to our own plans; by becoming mired in our disappointments, anger and resentments; by refusing to forgive, refusing to let go. Part of the gift that Jesus brings us is the love and humility to admit our mistakes and forgive the mistakes of others.

The moment of recognition is the “Aha” moment. That is when we know things are right, when we are connected, when we are in the right place and pointed in the right direction. This is when our eyes are opened and we can see.

Listen to the invitation from Jesus. “Come, join me in the breaking of the bread. In the breaking of the bread you will see me, you will know me. My body I gave for you; my blood was poured out for you. This is my gift to you, so that you may live in me and I in you; and so that you may see the Father revealed in all His Glory.”

And now to Him whose Power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus, forever and ever. Amen.³

³ Ephesians 3:20-21