

Luke 24:13-35, Third Sunday in Easter, 2008, year A

On the road to Emmaus, maybe it happened *this* way.

We just *had* to get out of town. So, in the late-afternoon we headed west toward Emmaus.

Too much had happened, and everything was out of control.

It started out *great* last week. We all cheered as Jesus rode the donkey into town. He paraded down the street just like a king.

That was the way it was supposed to stay.

Then four days later we heard he'd been arrested!

Somebody said Jesus even *knew* this was going to happen, knew that one of his own apostles would betray him. He *let* it happen.

The tide turned so fast.

Nobody defended him, not even those eleven who were left from the elite "chosen ones".

He didn't even *defend himself* at his trial!

Then the awful beating, his stumbling walk to carry the cross, the horrible nailing to the Cross, the Crucifixion, the death....and the earthquake, the temple curtain being torn open, and the darkness.

But now today the *most* bewildering thing!

Early in the morning, two women found Jesus's tomb *empty*, the stone rolled away, and angels told them he was *alive*! They didn't see him. He was just *gone*.

As Cleopas and I walked along now, into the sunset, intensely and sadly rehashing all this, we realized a stranger had come alongside us, joining our walk.

He was no-one we recognized.

He listened as we told him the stories of the chaos in Jerusalem, but he just didn't seem to get it. How could he hear this and *not be agitated*?

But the real shock came when he called us "foolish" and said we were "slow to believe all (our) prophets had (already) declared".

He said "Was it not *necessary* that the Messiah should suffer these things and *then* enter into his *glory*?"

The stranger reminded us that Isaiah had written anticipating that a Suffering Servant would give his life for the world. We continued in silence as we thought about that. Then Cleopas, getting some understanding, said,

"Oh, I see. It's like our ancient Yom Kippur, our Day of Atonement, when the priest sacrificed a lamb as a sin offering to God. Jesus's death was a *ransom* to pay back Adam's and our sin. I can understand that. I've heard of paying ransom to free captives."

More silence, more shuffling along the dusty, darkening path. The stranger didn't speak. Eventually I began to see what Cleopas was saying. "You mean Jesus died for our sins? Took our punishment? That's like the other lamb we sacrificed at Yom Kippur. All Israel's sins were taken on by that scapegoat; and we were cleared, free to go on. Then we drove the scapegoat out of the temple, into the wilderness for it to die."

More silence. More walking, step after step. Finally the stranger spoke, "Do those ideas *help* you make *sense* of Jesus's Crucifixion?" A long silence this time, and darkness started to fall. Our sadness continued, and the evening became chilly.

Then the stranger spoke, "I can see why Jesus reminds you of the sacrificed lamb. He too was innocent and killed. And, like the scapegoat, Jesus *was* driven out of the city to his death. However, let me remind you of something else the High Priest does at Yom Kippur. It puts an additional light on things."

"Do you remember that in that yearly liturgy, before any sacrifices, before any confessing, the High Priest approaches the *people*. He comes out from behind the temple's curtain; and he's dressed in white, acting as God, representing God. The High Priest comes out from the Holy of Holies acting as the Creator coming to us, offering acceptance and forgiveness to us. The Creator comes into creation to "unsnarl" the people, to save creation. No killing. No sacrificing. Not even any confessing yet. Can you see that Jesus did that for us?"

“And another big thing is that in the midst of all the rules in Leviticus the Lord said to Moses, “You shall not take vengeance..., but you shall love your neighbor as yourself....”? (Leviticus, 19;18, NRSV)

“Do you remember hearing that at the Last Supper Jesus gave that rule as a new *commandment*? He said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

(John 13: 34,35, NRSV)

“He offered the peace that passes understanding, the peace of knowing you are loved by God and that we all are equal and connected in that. The new covenant of love. Not legalism. Not power or violence. Not competition.

Don’t you remember that at the Last Supper he said, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.’?” (Mark 14:24, NRSV)

That’s what the stranger said. It *was* a different way to think about it all.

We were quiet and kept walking. “Remember Micah’s words?”, he continued.

“With what shall I come before the Lord...? ...with burnt offerings, with calves a year old... with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, ...for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what *does* the Lord require of

you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:6-8, NRSV)

He continued, "Remember Isaiah saying God didn't *want* us to approach him with our hands full of blood, but rather to 'cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, (and) plead for the widow.'?" (Isaiah 1:13-15, NRSV)

"Remember Amos saying that God said

'I take no delight in your solemn assemblies, ...I will not accept (your burnt offerings)... I will not look upon them. *But* let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream' ". (Amos 5:21-24, NRSV)

The stranger continued, "Jesus lived and died to show us *this*, that what the Lord requires of you is love. Love one another as he has loved you. Work for justice. Love mercy. Rescue the oppressed. Give aid to the poor. Regard the other person as being as beloved as yourself. One family of humankind. Place yourself before God and before one-another in humility, not in self-righteousness or separateness."

Somehow the stranger's words cast Jesus's death in another light. Jesus *had* been killed. *People* had killed him. But his love was somehow outside that system of violence. His love was somehow stronger than that hatred, jealousy, and struggle for power. We continued walking, approaching the dim lights of Emmaus.

I thought again about the report of this morning's empty tomb. Maybe there *was* hope in the miracle of that. Maybe it was all starting to make sense when you looked at it the way the stranger had explained. Humankind kills, but *God raises to life*. God's love is life to us...life in the midst of earthly problems and life beyond death.

As we continued closer to Emmaus, the stranger "walked ahead as if he were going on", as if he wanted us to be free to go on our own now. So we called to him and asked him to *stay with* us for the evening meal and for the night. At the inn, as he broke bread with us, our eyes were suddenly opened, and we recognized him just before he "vanished from our sight".

Jesus! We marveled to realize that he held no resentment. We could see the truth in the rumor that from the cross he'd forgiven those who crucified him, saying they didn't understand what they were doing. Unconditional forgiveness. Unconditional love. No wonder "our hearts (had been) burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us".

Well, we couldn't *stay* in *Emmaus* that night. We were too excited. So, we set-out again, this time on the road *back* to Jerusalem...headed east, headed through the dark to what we knew would become the light of dawn.

Maybe it happened that way on the road to Emmaus.

How does it happen for *you* on your road of life *today*? Do you recognize Christ alongside you?

Are our hearts open to see Christ in one-another? *Or* are our eyes “kept from recognizing him” because we self-righteously disagree with the other person’s politics ...or religion...or attitude? Or are our eyes kept from humbly recognizing Christ in the other person since we feel ourself superior to the other person because of his or her mistakes? Or because we don’t want to be bothered.

Listen, please, to the following words of Christ. After hearing them, ask yourself if *your* heart burns with compassion and understanding. For *this* is what the stranger on the road to Emmaus would have us know.

“Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ and the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a

stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' " (Matthew 25:35-46, NRSV)