

Texts: Acts 2:14a, 36-41, Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

Let's begin by imagining for a moment what those two disciples had gone through in the last few days. They had gathered with Jesus to keep the Passover feast, and there he had told them that one of them would betray him. Later that evening it had actually happened: while he and a few of his inner circle were at the Mount of Olives, Judas had come back with a crowd and after a scuffle, they took Jesus into custody.

The disciples had watched from a distance as first the council of chief priests and scribes, then Pontius Pilate and finally Herod questioned Jesus. They listened in horror as the crowd became so insistent that Pilate finally gave in to their demands to punish him with crucifixion. These two disciples saw it happen – they watched as Jesus was forced to carry his cross out to Golgotha, watched as he was nailed to it, and watched as he died an agonizing death.

Then earlier that very morning, a group of women had gone out to the tomb and then came running back in a near panic. Jesus' body was not where it had been laid. Those women told a crazy story, something about Jesus being alive. But you know that women could not be believed to tell the truth.

Now at the end of the day, these two disciples, Cleopas and the other one, are trudging back to Emmaus, trying to make sense of everything that had happened. Does that sound anything like your life? Something takes place that turns your world upside down – a death in the family, or a car accident, a diagnosis. Or something else – it doesn't even need to be anything tragic: your son or daughter graduates from high school, you decide to retire, or take a new job, or move to a new place. In all that change, whatever it

is, there is real and palpable loss, and you find yourself asking what it all means, why you feel so troubled. You find yourself asking where God is in this chaos that is your life.

I think that is what Cleopas and his friend were talking about as they walked the seven miles to Emmaus. They were trying to understand, trying to figure out what it all meant.

And then they met a stranger on the road. Who asks them what must seem to be the most absurd question ever: “What are you talking about? What things have happened?” “Dude,” replies Cleopas, “Where have you been in these last few days? Living under a rock?” And they go on to describe everything that has happened. They name it: the pain they are feeling, the confusion, the loss, the sorrow.

That’s key here, because it would be so easy for me to simply preach that Jesus shows up in our doubt and disappointment, that he is present in our grief, that he meets us where we are. All of that is true, of course, Jesus does do all that. But he does more: He joins in the conversation. He doesn’t simply walk along silently; he invites us to name where it hurts. Luke tells us that Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself written in the scriptures. He helped Cleopas and his friend to understand. He does the same for us -- enables us to figure out what it all means. As he walks along the road beside us, listening and conversing with us, he brings us from death to resurrection.

And then something more happens. Cleopas and his friend arrive at their destination and invite Jesus to stay with them. It’s time for the evening meal. As they sit down to supper, Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them. Took. Blessed. Broke. Gave. The same exact words that Luke uses to describe what Jesus did at the last supper. The same exact words that Luke uses to describe what Jesus did with five

loaves and two fish when he fed 5,000 people. At that moment Cleopas and his friend recognize who it is who has traveled the distance with them. In the breaking of the bread, Jesus brings them from death to resurrection.

That's what Jesus does: he doesn't just show up, he goes the distance with you. He doesn't just say, "There, there it will get better;" he joins in the conversation with you, taking the chaos and hurt and transforming it. And he doesn't just leave when you get to your destination; he stops and breaks bread with you. He blesses you. He opens your eyes to see him. He brings you from death to resurrection.

Every single day for nearly 2,000 years, Christians have gathered somewhere on this planet to break bread together and celebrate Christ's presence among them. All of those who have gone before us, and all of those who will come after us gather around us as we come to the Lord's table. And yet at the moment that you taste the bread and wine, the risen Jesus makes himself known to you and you alone. Jesus' promise is spoken to you: This is my body, given for you. My blood shed for you. The God who was and is and is to come, comes to each one of us, this very day.

Still there are times when we find it hard to see the risen Christ. Jesus didn't look like the one those two disciples had expected to see. Where is Easter in this world of change and loss, trouble and death?

I can tell you where I see Easter. I see it in the eyes of a man named David who comes every month to get food from our pantry. We usually have a conversation about what is going on in his life, about his wife, about their life together, about what he likes to cook. I see Easter in the prayers and care that this community offers to those who have undergone treatment for cancer, or who are preparing for surgery, or who are

experiencing some type of loss or change. I see Easter in the smiles of the folks at Crestview a couple of weeks ago as the community choir came to sing for them.

How has the risen Jesus brought you from death to resurrection? Where do you see Easter? I am going to invite you to take a minute right now. Turn to someone sitting near you and tell where you met Jesus in this past week, where Jesus came to walk alongside of you and helped you make sense of the changes in your life. ...

We are Easter people. We proclaim a Savior who has died and now is risen, who brings us from death to resurrection. What does that mean for us?

- It means that we live differently. We live knowing that death does not have the final word.
- We live in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- We live knowing that we have been born anew, through the water of our baptism.
- We live in thanksgiving for the life we have received, eternal life that begins here and now.
- We live as recipients of God's promise, given to us through God's living and enduring Word.
- We live as saints as well as sinners, knowing ourselves to be forgiven.
- We live in faith and hope. We live in astonishment. We live in praise.

There is one more thing about this story. Luke never tells us the name of the disciple who travels along with Cleopas. That is intentional. Because Luke wants you to imagine yourself as that disciple. It's you who walk the road to Emmaus, you who meet that stranger, you who tell him all those things that have happened – the loss and chaos and

death. It's you who hear his voice, you who invite him to stay, you whose eyes are opened to recognize him in the breaking of the bread.

It's you, disciple. The risen Jesus brings you from death to resurrection.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!