

Sermons at Christ Church

Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace.

Easter III

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“Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!” the stranger said to Cleopas and the unnamed friend with whom he journeyed from Jerusalem to Emmaus. This was a seven mile walk which on the average should take about two hours and twenty minutes. We do not know how far they had walked before they encountered a stranger on the way.

For many of us who enjoy walking-like Isaac-Jr Warden, it is perfectly normal to meet a stranger on the trail and engage in a conversation. These conversations aren’t scripted and often cover different topics. The interesting thing about meeting a stranger on the trail and holding a conversation is that these conversations often connects the eye with the mind.

In the gospel story, the stranger who met Cleopas and his friend simply asked what they were talking about. It appeared that this stranger was oblivious about the events that had taken place in Jerusalem. Word travels, but it seemed like the word hasn’t gotten to this stranger yet. He hadn’t been watching CNN or Fox News or MSNBC so he missed the breaking news. Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem, they asked? Yes, I am. Tell me about the events that had taken place.

Cleopas and his friend, who have been friends with Jesus and so were witnesses to what happened, narrated that their friend, who like a magnet pulled all other friends together, was crucified. Not because of a crime he committed but because the Chief Priest and other leaders handed him over to the Roman authorities. It’s been three days since the crucifixion.

They then went on to add that some of the women who were also friends with the crucified one, went to the tomb this morning and brought news that they didn’t see the body at the tomb. Rather, they saw visions of angels who told them that the Lord is risen. Some of the men run to the tomb and found it as the women had told them. The story astounded them. It is one of the strangest stories they ever heard. The story is a testament to the fact that belief in Jesus, even after his crucifixion and resurrection was not self-evident among his friends.

The stranger's initial response must have surprised Cleopas and his friend *"Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared."* It was a response that sought to holdup the chasm between what the eyes can see and what the mind can accept. It was a response that sought to throw light on the often disconnect between what the eyes can see and a mind that is so tainted that it cannot respond to what the eyes can see.

The stranger then used the opportunity to connect the eyes of Cleopas and his friend-what they had seen and witnessed over the past couple of days with what their minds should have figured out long ago-the stranger opened the scriptures for Cleopas and his friend. I once came by a quote by Mark Venturini ***"The eyes are useless when the mind is blind."*** This proverb sort of sums up the stranger's response to what Cleopas and his friend shared with him.

How possible that they couldn't connect the brutal experience of what their eyes saw with the scriptures? How could they have been so slow to discern God's plan as revealed by the prophets all along?

As the stranger opened the scriptures for them, he didn't only help them in connecting the dots, but the stranger helped them to connect their eyes with their minds. A deep and healthy connection of the mind and eye helps us to not only discern what it is that God is calling us to do, but we can take the steps that are necessary for us to grow in our understanding of our relationship with God and one another. A connection of the mind with the eye helps us to see more clearly and to decide where God is calling us to go. A connection of the eye with the mind helps us to believe, to be faithful, to be generous and to be compassionate. A connection of eye and mind help us is to seek changes in our own lives, the lives of our neighbors and communities.

The most profound part of the long walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus was that when Cleopas and his friend got to where they were going, and with the stranger walking ahead of them, they invited the stranger into their home-it is late they said, come in and stay with us. The stranger responded to the invitation of Cleopas and his friend-see, the gospel comes in two ways: an invitation and a response.

When we experience the grace of connecting eyes with mind, we are supposed to respond in this way-the stranger no longer is a stranger, the stranger becomes the one with whom we break bread and the one who embodies for us the fullness of God.

It is only by inviting, welcoming and breaking bread together do we see the risen Christ. It is only in that fellowship is the risen Christ made visible to us and that is when we see the hand of God in our lives and the life of everyone.

For those who killed Jesus, their eyes were useless because the mind was blind. Their minds could not fathom how God could even be incarnate in them much less in a carpenter's son. Their minds could not comprehend what the prophet Isaiah once said: *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts. Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth. So are My ways higher than your ways. And My thoughts than your thoughts."* Because of the blindness of the mind they thought that God's way had to be their way.

But you ought to be different because your mind isn't blind. And because your mind isn't blind you can see, and because you can see, you can connect the eyes with the mind and make changes that are heartfelt. Changes that move us forward. Changes that actually testify to us that we at least met Christ on our long walk.

In our first reading, Peter and his friends, empowered by the Holy Spirit go out to proclaim the very message of the crucified Jesus. They connected the eyes of the people with their minds. Their response was simple, *"Brothers, what should we do?"*

If this has been the message all along, then what should we do? Peter encourages them to be baptized-to seek that one path which establishes each of us, strangers as we are, into the fellowship of Christ body where there are no Jews or Gentiles, male or female, slave or free, but all are one. And because all are one, we share, not only the good news of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ, but we share our lives together, we share our gifts together, we share our resources together, we share our tears together, we share our joys together, we share our burdens together, we share our sorrows together, we share our laughter together and like Tim and Sherry, we share our milestones together. My beloved, it is only through this process of sharing together in fellowship that our hearts will burn within us-that is when our eyes and minds would be open at last to see that the stranger was not a stranger after all-it was the risen Christ.

A mother asked her child about some stolen cookies "Do you know that God was here, when you were stealing cookies from the kitchen?" "Yes, I do." He responded. "And do you know that he was looking at you all this time?" Asked the mother. "Yes, I do."

The child responded. “And how do you think, what would he have said?” The mother asked. “He said: “There is nobody here apart from us, so take some cookies for me, too!” God wanted a share of the stolen cookies.

The past several days have been grim, tough and harrowing for many families-a lady who accidentally drove on someone’s driveway, got shot. A young boy who rings the wrong doorbell got shot. A kid who runs to a neighbor’s front lawn to pick her basketball got shot. You hear these stories and begin to wonder what has become of our society-that we cannot even tolerate a stranger who accidentally drives on our driveway, rings our doorbell or has her basketball roll to our front lawn. This isn’t only about gun violence, it is about a serious moral decay in our society-we cannot connect the eye with the mind. We cannot connect what we see with our compassionate self because we have no compassion left in us. We can no longer think straight-our minds are blind with stuff that destroy us.

Easter. The season that opens our eyes to behold all that is possible. Easter reminds us that we are also on a journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and we often walk depressed, deflated, confused, dejected, questioning and wondering. But may it never be lost on us that we are a resurrected people and it is only when we work to connect the eye with the mind can we see that the Lord is risen indeed, and he is at work in us and in our world. Amen.