

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter, yr. a, 4/26/2020

Luke 24:13-35

Take...Bless...Break...Give – Rev. Dr. Deborah M. Jenks

\*\*\*\*\*

From time to time I've wondered why the gospels tell many, many stories of Jesus – how he came to be born, his life and teachings, calling disciples, healing, challenging religious authorities, going into excruciating detail about his crucifixion – but they say practically nothing about his appearances after his resurrection. The gospels, the letters of Paul and others, the account in The Acts of the Apostles of what Jesus followers did in the years after the resurrection certainly testify to and proclaim that “Jesus is Risen”, but they say very little about what happened in their encounters with the risen Jesus.

There are I think times when things happen in our lives, when we experience events that open our eyes, open our minds, break our hearts and cause them to burn within us, stir us to act in ways we never would have imagined before, which we cannot put into words. Words are inadequate ... words alone are not quite able to convey the mystery of what we do not know, yet somehow know to be true. Christ's resurrection from the dead, the holiness, presence, the grace, love and mercy of God need to be experienced ... and in response to the way God's presence in Christ works transformation in our lives, we want with all our heart and soul to do something! ... Do anything!!

I'm put in mind of a story I heard once about Martha Graham, the groundbreaking modern dancer who broke through conventional ideas and traditions of

dance in her work. She was asked by someone who saw a performance, “Tell me what it means.” Graham is said to have replied, “Honey, if I could tell you I wouldn’t have had to dance it.” Somehow words alone are not enough ... and the more words we use, the more lame they can sound.

Of the few accounts of the disciples’ encounters with the risen Christ, the one that most often resonates with my own experience is the story of the two friends, disciples of Jesus, who are joined on their journey to Emmaus by a stranger who turns out to be the risen Jesus.

- These two disciples have just experienced a profound and traumatic loss, with Jesus’ crucifixion and death. They are confused by news of an empty tomb and that Jesus was alive. In their grief and loss and confusion they are moving on ... heading home, back to ordinary familiar life, turning the events over and over between them. When on their journey they are joined by Jesus himself ... and they take him to be a stranger. And he asks them what they’re talking about.
- Two phrases get my attention: “ ... but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” And “But we had hoped ...”.

What keeps their eyes from recognizing him? I imagine it might have something to do with what they had hoped ... and how those hopes seem unrealized and unfulfilled. They are so full of their own grief, disappointment, heartbreak, and sorrow that they can’t even believe that this stranger who’s joined them on the road hasn’t heard about the things they are talking about ... the things that fill

their attention and conversation. There is a saying from the rabbis in the Jewish Talmud (Commentary on the Scripture): “We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are.”

When Cleopas and his unnamed friend are astonished that Jesus seems to know nothing about the events in Jerusalem, they fill him in ... sharing all that fills them ... their dashed hopes, and expectations ... their pain and grief ... their confusion ... “But (they) had hoped” it is everything that keeps their eyes from recognizing him ... not as they think of him, but how he really is.

The recognition for them comes with words and actions – a recognition that comes with time and in the context of on-going, ordinary not really extraordinary relationship. The words come from Jesus as he takes their story, which is trapped in the closed circle of their dashed hopes and expectations, and tells it in a deeper context ... the context of God’s love and grace, describing the hope underneath despair, the joy to be found in the midst of suffering and pain, the healing to be found in facing truth. But the words themselves are not quite enough.

As they came near the village to which they were going ... they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took

bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.

“Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him in the breaking of the bread” ... We cannot know anyone, recognize who anyone is, unless we spend time with them. We can encounter the risen Christ, know God’s abiding presence in our lives for ourselves, as our everyday is permeated with encounters, with reminders and remembrances, with sharing, nourishment, loving presence, and relationship.

The risen Christ is known in the hospitality of the breaking of bread – a hospitality, a living relationship that encompasses both the night before crucifixion and the Day of Resurrection – both suffering and joy, pain and healing, betrayal and reconciliation.

I’m thinking that perhaps there are so few stories of the risen Jesus in the gospels, because they would get in the way ... they would keep our eyes from recognizing God’s presence ... where God is moving in our souls, and in this world. The new, fresh, abundant life that God offers in Christ is known and shared as we embrace a way of living open to encounter, recognition, presence, and being sent.

A life in which everyday we Take ... Bless ... Break ... Give ... until our eyes are opened and we recognize ... and then do it again and again. Amen.

