

Luke 24:13-35

That very day, the first day of the week, two of the disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Aha!

May the words of my lips, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord.

As many of you know, I am a mathematician. Being a mathematician, I have enjoyed a rare experience, called an "Aha" moment. The feeling is exhilarating; at one moment you are in the dark about something, and in the next, everything is crystal clear. My most vivid experience of this phenomenon took place twenty years ago in Germany. A Canadian colleague visited Göttingen where I was on sabbatical for the year. By the spring, my German had gotten good enough that I could play the local to

his short-term visit. We talked each night about mathematics over dinner, about the problems we were working on, and life in academia. On his last day, he gave a lecture that I eagerly attended, and in the first minute he said something that I immediately recognized as an unexpected path to a solution of a problem that I had just spent six months failing to solve differently. I missed most of the lecture scratching out the details, but it was time well-spent. It led to the my favorite paper. The surprise I experienced is still fresh for me.

In the mini-drama that Luke presents in today's gospel, two of Jesus's disciples experience an unparalleled 'Aha!' moment. The tension of the days after the crucifixion were clear—the eleven had hidden themselves in a locked room. There was much grieving and sorrow. It was a good time for a long walk, together with a companion, to talk it out. Maybe between the two of them they could understand what had happened and relieve the burden of their grief.

It isn't hard to put ourselves in their place. Recent events identify many folks with Cleopas and his companion—for the Roman Catholic Church, the passing of the Pope puts the future on hold in the absence of this beloved individual and teacher. Here at Christ Church, we are at the beginning of a search for a new rector; on our own, without our teacher to hint at the future.

In Luke's story, a stranger enters the disciples' conversation, "What are these words that you are exchanging as you walk?" And they respond by stopping, their emotional state clear; "They stood there sorrowfully." Cleopas answers in what I hear are petulant words—*Are you the only person around here who doesn't know how uncertain our future has become? Our teacher is gone. He was going to liberate us.*

The stranger is the risen Christ, unrecognized by the travelers, whose eyes 'were held from recognizing him.' He may not have been recognized, but he was still a teacher and he went on to discuss Scripture with them, outlining the prophecies that were realized through Jesus's life and death, turning the terrible events into a fulfillment, a path that liberates everyone in an unexpected and incomprehensible way.

Later, when the companions related their meeting, they recalled how, during this teaching, their 'hearts burned.' They reached a state of openness in their grief where they could be transformed, where their 'Aha!' moment could take place. Jesus appeared to want to continue his walk after they had reached Emmaus, but they urged him to accept their hospitality, to accept their openness. "Stay with us, for evening is near" As they supped, they recognized him in a moment of transformation, when he blessed the bread, broke it, and gave it to them.

'Aha!' The words of the women are true, he is risen. The prophecies he made us know are fulfilled. Suddenly, everything is clear. And Christ was gone. I am not sure that they ate their meal, but returning to Jerusalem, they learned that Jesus had appeared to Simon Peter and they related how they had recognized him in the breaking of the bread.

Recently I heard a lecture by the president of Colgate University, Rebecca Chopps, a theologian who spoke about the place of religion and spirituality in the liberal arts college. She defined spirituality as the journey an individual takes to find an interior life. All of us here, who make the trip to church on Sunday, seek spirituality and the peace it

brings. We are on the way to Emmaus. And our companions? Look around you. The community we build together provides us with conversation along the way. At times, we can stand ‘sorrowfully’ on our journey, lost in grief, confusion, and sorrow. At times, we must approach our fellow journeyers unrecognized, in the hope of saying something that might set a heart to burn again. The mini-drama of the road to Emmaus is repeated daily, and one day we may play one role, the next day another.

We have this story of Luke’s as a guide—to learn to listen to Scripture, to be open to each other in conversation, to reach the state of openness when ‘Aha!’ can happen.

And in our liturgy we repeat the transforming moments every week here in Christ Church. There is the liturgy of the word to bring us into conversation, and the liturgy of the Eucharist and Communion when the bread is broken and the choir commemorates the ‘Aha!’ moment in Emmaus: ‘The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread.’

Wherever we are on our journey, together we can become aware of the truth of the resurrection, that we can be transformed, and share the transformation experienced by the companions in Emmaus.

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April 10, 2005