

This post-Easter season is my favorite time of the year to preach. I love returning to these stories of the resurrection, and each gospel has its own story. All the stories are unique to their particular gospels, but what they have in common is that they all have a certain elusiveness to them. They all have an enigmatic mysterious quality, which seems to me to perfectly fit the events of that first Easter.

The story in Luke that we just heard about the two people who meet with the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus is no exception. It too has this elusive mysterious quality. It almost raises as many questions as it answers. How come these two people don't recognize Jesus? Why does Jesus appear to these two seemingly insignificant characters? Why not to the 12 disciples? Why is only one of these two, Cleopas, named? What does Jesus say when he explained the scriptures to them? Why aren't those words recorded? It would make preaching a lot easier if they were. Why does Jesus disappear just as soon as they recognize who he is?

This, like all the resurrection stories, has an enigmatic quality which seems entirely appropriate. This story, like all the resurrection stories, isn't only important as a historical record of what happened that first Easter. It's important because it speaks directly to our situation. Paul says in Romans, "If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his spirit that dwells in you." When we read the stories of the resurrection, we're reading of our own experience. The resurrection of Jesus is the first fruit of the hope that is set before all of us. The resurrection opens for us a new quality of life that extends beyond the grave.

I want to expand on this by saying something about how the journey that Jesus makes with these two disciples from Jerusalem to Emmaus demonstrates three aspects of the spiritual journey that we make with Jesus. The first of these three points is this, that we make our journey with Jesus. Hear what it says at the beginning of our reading. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them. Jesus himself came and walked alongside them. Jesus himself drew near, as the old translation says. In the Christian journey, we don't journey to God. We don't see God as the prize waiting at the end of a righteous journey. We don't journey to God, we journey with God. This is the message of the Pentecost season, which we'll soon be celebrating. We can ask Jesus to stay with us.

Pentecost is all about the coming of the Spirit. Jesus promised his disciples that after he'd gone, he'd return to them by his Spirit, and that promise was fulfilled at Pentecost. On that day, as the Spirit was poured out amongst the disciples, the God who was made known in Jesus came and dwelt with his people by his Spirit. Or in the words we've heard from St. Paul, "The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you." One of the words used to describe the Spirit is *paraclete*, which means "one who draws alongside". It's originally a nautical term. It's use of a little boat that will go out to a bigger boat and escort it into the harbor. You'll see the comparison. Just as Jesus drew alongside the disciples on the road to Emmaus, so the Spirit comes to us, draws alongside us. We don't journey to God, we journey with God.

The flip side of this great truth is that we must be attentive to the presence of God by his Spirit in our lives, in our surroundings. There was a great advert in England a few years ago by the Cycling Awareness Trust. There were two teams in this advert, one team of four dressed in white, one team of four dressed in black, and they both had a ball. The caption came up, "Count how many times the team in white catches the ball." The advert came on and we all watched intently, and then it came at the end 13. The team in white caught the ball 13 times. Then another caption came on and said, "And did you see the moon walking gorilla?" They played the action again, and sure enough, whilst we were all counting how many times the white team caught a ball, a man in a gorilla suit goes right across the middle of the screen, moon walking, and nobody noticed because we were all counting the ball. Then the strapline comes up, "You can't see what you're not looking for."

Great truth for the resurrection season. If God is with us, then we find him where we are, if we're looking, if we're attentive to the presence of the risen Jesus in our lives. We need to be expectant, expectant to meet him where we are.

The second thing I noticed about this journey is that this is a journey during which these two disciples are transformed. They are very different at the end of the journey than they are at the beginning. Our spiritual journey should see us transformed. We're part of a process of ongoing transformation. When we first meet these two disciples, they're walking away from Jerusalem. They are downcast and they're sad. Look at the tense or listen to the tense of the verb in this phrase. "We had hoped Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel." They had hoped. They'd given up. Yet it was to these two weary, confused agnostic disciples

that Jesus came and blessed them with his presence. They were key apostles. Only one's got a name, the other one we've never heard of. They were ordinary, unlikely followers, but they were the ones to whom Jesus drew near.

I've always been fascinated by how the story ends. "Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he vanished from their sight." As they recognized Jesus, he disappears. Just as the penny drops, Jesus leaves. I've always thought that if this had happened to me, I'd be very frustrated. I'd have said, "Oh I wish I'd just asked him this. I wish I'd had the chance to ask one more question, or five minutes more."

There's a magazine in London called Time Out, and they used to have a column called "Once Seen". You'd get adverts like this. "Fourth of the fourteenth, or 4/14, Fulham Broadway Station, 4:30 p.m. You, dark hair, beautiful eyes, brown jacket, briefcase. Me, black jacket, beard. Box 1768." The idea was if you were the other person who was once seen, you were to contact that person. There was no similar ad in the Jerusalem Post the week after Easter. "Road to Emmaus, Easter day, p.m. You, beard, white male" ... Not white male. Sorry. "Beard, white robes, recently resurrected, scars on hands and feet."

There was no such notice because they were satisfied. They had enough. These two men had no regrets. They were happy with the time they'd spent with Jesus. They weren't left waiting for more. Jesus told them all they needed to know. They didn't know everything, but they knew enough. They must have still had lots of unanswered questions, but they were certain of one thing, that Jesus was alive. This was enough to transform their situation.

Christianity, or Christian certainty, doesn't have to mean an unappealing kind of narrow absolutism that claims to know all the answers to all of the life's big questions. Our certainty isn't founded on the knowledge that we know everything. It's founded on the knowledge that Jesus has been raised from the dead. That's the basis for our certainty. There's a certain elusiveness about the Christian faith, which is very evident in this story. We can never claim to know everything, but like these two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we can know enough.

What is revealed is enough. It's enough to bring about an amazing transformation in the disciples. By the end of their journey, their sadness was turned to joy, their hope was restored, and understanding had come where before there'd been confusion.

Finally, this story emphasizes that the Christian journey is not an individual pilgrimage. It's a journey we make together. At the end of the story, we see that these two disciples respond to the realization that they've met with Jesus by going straight to the other disciples and they share their news. They don't keep it to themselves. So it is with us. The new life we share in Jesus is a common life that we live out together. It's not something we can live out on our own. We don't travel alone. We travel together. The wonder of that is that we don't travel as a group of like-minded people. We're not a group of similar people held together by common backgrounds and interests. Like that first band of disciples, we're a disparate group bound together by sharing in the new life that Jesus has won for us that first Easter. We come with different questions, different answers, different experience, but we need each other and we need to travel together if we're to find that full, rich, and deep understanding of what living the resurrection life is all about.

Of course, we remember that we gather together today in the context of a communion service, and soon we'll be continuing that practice that Jesus started of breaking bread together. As we follow Jesus instructions to eat bread and wine together, we're taking on food for the journey. If we go on any journey, we need to pack supplies, we need to have the resources that we need. The bread and the wine is spiritual food to nourish us on our journey.

Three things that this great story tells us about our spiritual journey. We journey with Jesus, it's a journey of transformation, and it's a journey we make in the company of others. Hallelujah. Christ is risen.

The Lord has risen indeed. Hallelujah!