

Third Sunday of Easter (A/RCL)
Luke 24.13-35
April 6, 2008
Holy Trinity, Manasquan

The Gospel for this day of your First Holy Communion is about two of Jesus' friends who walked seven miles from Jerusalem (where Jesus was crucified) home to a place called Emmaus. This was a long time ago, before there were cars or even bicycles. They weren't rich enough to own horses to ride, so they walked everywhere. It was a long way, as far as if we walked from Manasquan all the way north to Asbury Park or south to Mantoloking or west to Candlewood. They were so sad about Jesus' death, the trip seemed even longer than it really was. We could say that they walked with "feet of lead," because they were so weighed down with sadness, and their hearts were so heavy with grief. It felt like all their hopes and dreams had died right along with Jesus Himself.

It's kind of a funny story, because Jesus ends up walking behind His friends on the road, and they don't even recognize Him! One of them was named Cleopas, and we don't know the other's name, but it may have been Cleopas' wife.... So how come they didn't recognize their dear friend Jesus?? Who knows. Sometimes we don't recognize someone we're not expecting to see, and they sure didn't think Jesus would be popping up in their lives again. There was something about His risen body, too, that made it hard for folks to recognize Him, because there were others, too, who didn't know they were talking to the risen Lord, like Mary Magdalene in the Garden on Easter morning, when she thought Jesus was the gardener ☺.

It's not just that Cleopas didn't recognize Jesus, He just about insulted Him! Jesus asked what he and his friend were talking about as they walked along, and Cleopas asked (a bit rudely), "Are you the only one around here who doesn't know what's going on??" [It makes us want to say, "Pssst! Don't you know who this **is**??"] Jesus chose to pretend that He **didn't** know what had been going on, and He asked Cleopas and his companion to fill Him in. Jesus was a good

listener, and He knew that it helps folks who are sad to tell their story. So they talked and He listened. They said,

“We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”
Luke 24.21

They were disappointed that Jesus ended up on a cross instead of on a throne. In their disappointment they stopped believing that He was who had said He was. Sometimes in our disappointment we stop believing, too. But Jesus doesn't stay away because of it. He meets us where we're at, whether we're full of faith or emptied of faith. Like He appeared to the other disciples on Easter night, as they hid behind locked doors, He appeared to these disciples on the road, as they discussed how badly things had turned out for Him and them. Jesus doesn't abandon us, even when we stop believing.

When Cleopas and his friend were done with their story, Jesus started to talk. He explained that everything that had happened was part of God's plan for Him and for them. By the time they finished talking, they had reached Emmaus. And the disciples must have liked their traveling companion, because they said, “Stay with us....” (Luke 24.28) They felt better with Him around. They felt hope stirring inside their hearts again.

And Jesus **did** stay. He shared supper with them. And when he took and blessed and broke the bread, they finally figured out who their dinner companion was. It must have triggered their memory about the Last Supper, when Jesus had done the same thing. And then, just as they joyfully realized who He was – Jesus disappeared. And they said,

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24.32)

Jesus had celebrated Holy Communion with His friends in Emmaus that evening long ago, and they didn't even know it! He's celebrating Holy Communion with us today; **we're** blessed to know it! We believe that Jesus, our risen Lord, is the Host at this meal; He's the One who invites us, it's His home we're in, He provides the meal. He **is** the meal! The host is present in the Host! This bread becomes His Body, this wine becomes His Blood.

There are other special, memorable meals in our lives: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, birthdays, wedding receptions, funeral lunches, sports and awards banquets. In some ways they're like the Lord's Supper: we're surrounded by family and friends; eating together is a way to express our joy if it's a happy occasion, and to find comfort if it's a sad one; the food nourishes our bodies and the fellowship nourishes our souls.

The Lord's Supper is wonderfully different than those other food get-togethers, too, though. We believe it **can** help to heal our bodies.... But mostly it helps to heal our souls. Holy Communion holds the gift of the forgiveness of sins. In the Bible passage we heard from the 1st Letter of Peter, it says,

...[Y]ou were ransomed [bought out of slavery to sin]... not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.
(1 Peter 1.18-19)

When we're forgiven, the weight of sin is lifted, and we can walk upright as God's forgiven and much-loved children.

There's joy in forgiveness, and there's comfort in sorrow, and there's resurrection hope in the face of the death of our loved ones, when we're in the Lord's presence. We **are** in His presence whenever we hear the Word and dine at His table. Like Cleopas and his companion, we, too, say, "Stay with us, Lord!" And He does.... In our hearts. In His Word. In His Supper. In this family, the family of faith, the Body of Christ.

We who are members of your family say, "Welcome, brothers and sisters, to the Lord's table! Come often, whether you are happy **or** sad! Then, like Cleopas and his companion, who **ran** the seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell their friends the Good News of having met and recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread, go out on dancing feet to love and serve the Lord. Return often for the soul food that awaits you here." Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

