

Meeting Christ on the Road and at Table
A Sermon by the Very Rev'd Timothy Jones
Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, April 30, 2017
Luke 24:13-35

If today's Gospel reading makes a point,
it's that it's possible to miss something that's
happening right in front of you.

We can overlook all kinds of wonders,
and be downright clueless.

But it's also possible
to see afresh, and find your heart moved.

Children know this and experience it
instinctively.

When I was growing up our family would
sometimes take Saturday drives.

One time, when I was about eight years old,
we were late returning home,
so late that it had gotten dark outside the car.

We had taken a day trip away from our suburban
valley, where the glow of city lights always
meant the stars
weren't very bright at night.

But this evening I remember riding in the far
back compartment of our Chevrolet wagon as we
sped along some back-country California road.

Lying there, looking up at the pitch-black sky,
I could see the Milky Way
spattered across the sky.

That galaxy made a band of speckled light that
astonished and quieted me.

Never had I seen stars so bright.

Never had I been so dazzled by the heavens.

I had no idea all that was there!

Well, there's so much we miss.

A friend of mine now, a dad, talks about how that
awareness affects his parenting.

“There is a meadow within a short drive of our home, and sometimes we’ve driven an hour or more to get to a place dark enough to see a meteor shower.”

I like that.

For we can miss all kinds of amazing things—
but not just glories of nature,
but also insights, nudges, little moments of
awareness of the presence of God.

I’m pretty sure you and
I are missing some things.

But today we see how we can better pay attention
to little flashes of glory and new glimpses.

Today’s Gospel helps. Luke’s beloved story
heightens our expectations that the joy of Easter
two Sundays ago is still a living reality,
now, on this third Sunday of Easter,
or tomorrow, for that matter.

Even when our hopes flag, like they did for the
two disciples in today’s reading from Luke,

even when we've stopped seeing a presence—
His presence—goes with us.

If we live in a Christ-permeated world,
he can show up on the premises even when we
are barely watching and listening.

And our ability to see and sense
his presence can grow.

We first learn, though, that we come to
understand not just by looking harder.

I saw the Milky Way only when my family got
out under the vantage point of a darker sky.

Something changed.

Same with experiencing God.

I think also of how I went to church for years of
my childhood, and didn't experience much.

I believed in a vague sort of way but barely
thought of God.

And when I did the thought didn't inspire much interest or urgency. God had to get my attention.

It happened to me, this going deeper,
this discovery not just of the vast God of
creation, but the intimate God in Christ,
from a chance conversation on my eighth-grade
school yard. I was hanging out with my buddy,
Donald Lopez. Donald was the son of a Polish
Jew and a Mexican Catholic, and my best friend.

A mutual friend, Stan, came up to us both.

Somehow religion came up.

Stan turned to Donald and asked,

Have you ever read the New Testament?

Donald said something. I don't recall what.

But I do remember the answer that began to form
in me. I hadn't. I went home and started reading
the Gospels. The stories of Jesus.

I read about his miracles and compassion.

Christ himself began to emerge from those
paragraphs and pages as a living presence.

He came and found me, showed up as I read.

The One who was crucified, the One those grief-stricken disciples had stopped looking for after his death, draws up alongside them.

They do not come to him, he comes to them, unannounced. And they do not know him. In fact, Luke tells us, “Their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” That was God’s doing. We don’t know just why. It had to do with his timing and sense of what they were ready for.

Ever had the experience of seeing someone and not recognizing them?

By the way, that happens to me, this not being recognized, when I bump into parishioners at store or restaurant.

I’m in Birkenstocks and a casual shirt and jeans, no clerical collar or vestments, and it sometimes takes a double-take

for someone to recognize me.

I can think of one time I was glad!

I was racing up Gervais, headed here,

wishing I'd left five minutes sooner.

A car in front of me was *annoyingly* slow.

I honked, sped up to roared around them to pass,

looked over, and Oops! It was a parishioner!

Or think of going to a high-school reunion, after,

say, twenty years. A lot can happen to how we

look! You see someone across the room and see

only vague familiarity.

Well, the disciples don't, cannot recognize

This teacher who pulls up alongside them.

They do know something is affecting them;

soon they will speak of how during this time their

hearts were burning within them, how when he

taught the Scriptures something stirred in them.

We are like them in that we go along forgetting how much more is possible in experiencing God.

We stop expecting much, like the disciples. Not even really looking anymore. Forlorn, even.

Well, they knew *something*. In answer to this seeming stranger's question about who Jesus is, one of them explains, "Jesus of Nazareth ... was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and ... our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him."

That's a start, to be sure.

But Cleopas needed more help.

I don't think his sadness and shutting down was just disappointment that Jesus didn't conquer the Romans occupying Jerusalem.

I think he had hoped that his longing to know God

had come to find a home in Jesus and now Jesus
had gone absent. Now he was dead, along with
their hopes. Or so they thought.

Tragedy is often like a giant eraser,
Someone once said,
rubbing out all the jotted mental notes that tell us
things will be okay.

But Christ had the power to change that.
Cleopas couldn't realize who was right there,
Right next to him, right then.

But as a starting place, beginning with Moses and
all the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them the
things about himself in all the scriptures.

That would have been some Bible study.
The mother of all Bible studies.
And Jesus did reveal himself through the
Scriptures, just as he does today,
as we open them.

And I hope that happens here for you. There may be more possibilities than you realize: Bible studies, small groups, discussion groups.

By the way, my next clergy hire will be for a canon for formation, someone to help us multiply what is already an array of opportunities for study and growth and transformation.

Worship itself, of course,
We have many opportunities to learn and grow,
but I have a vision for even more.

Because it's possible for us, for more of us, to experience our hearts burning within us, as someone has said, "as fresh truth comes out of the old pages and sets us on fire."

For as much as nature, the sweep of sky or an ocean's horizon remind us of God's majesty, nature won't fire and feed our longing for a deep relationship with God.

But there's still a climax to the story.

Those two followers may have forgotten Jesus's
teaching that he would die and be raised,
but they remembered their
manners and invite him to dinner.

Jesus never turned down an invitation to dinner!

And what a dinner. We don't know what was on
the menu, except that there was bread,
blessed and broken and shared.

That's when the revelation that rocks them back
on their heels happens.

So much can happen around a table.

By the way, speaking of meals,
many are the weeks we serve a thousand meals.

You heard me right. Between morning and
noonday Bible studies, Wednesday programs, our
Sunday morning guests, many of whom are
homeless, vestry, diocesan functions, daily meals
three times a day for our Trinity Learning Center.

A thousand!

Our kitchen and our meal tables are holy ground.

And I've called, as you have heard,
Dorian Del Priore to be canon for parish life.

With all the many things a priest does,
Dorian will help us find ways in our common life
to grow even deeper in our meeting together and
sharing table.

Luke tells us that it was during a meal that the
disciples recognized, finally,
the risen Jesus right there.

An ordinary meal in an ordinary house.

But don't forget how we go to the table to break
bread every Sunday. How the altar is set with
bread and wine and an invitation,
making it a table.

Father IV Lyons asked me to lead a Lenten Quiet
Day at Good Shepherd here in Columbia this year.

The topic and theme he gave me:
"Discovering the Face of Christ in the Eucharist."

I had to think about that as I prepared,
but as I did I realized how apt the topic was.
Every Sunday we get to repeat the meal Jesus
gave to his followers at his Last Supper with
them, and the meal that we hear about today, this
resurrection dinner.

He appears to us. Every time. All meet him there,
see him, sense his presence,
even glimpse how he becomes
present and close to us.