

April 26, 2020     'Easter in US'     (Luke 24:13-35)     Rev. Jane Courtright

Our journey along this 'Coronavirus Road' is definitely one of the *strangest* in our lives! This road *seems* to have come upon us suddenly, without warning and we make our way very slowly. We are accustomed, many of us, to planning our own lives and living at a hurried pace.

How can the 'Emmaus Road' story speak to us right now? While on this 'Coronavirus Road,' is there a chance that we can also really see our Risen Christ? Let's explore the story and its possibilities!

I also find the story of the road to Emmaus to be one of the strangest of the resurrection appearances. Jesus appears to the surprise of those who see him, talks to the disciples and then (poof!) disappears again.

But Emmaus was seven miles from Jerusalem (that's at least two hours walking) and even after those two disciples spent those hours walking with and talking to Jesus.... Jesus stayed with them until a meal was prepared.

And Jesus put all that time to good use! He explained and interpreted all the scriptures to Cleopas and his friend, starting with Moses and all the prophets. And *still* those two disciples didn't recognize Jesus.

I do find that quite odd. How can you not recognize someone you know so well? I admit it, I don't always remember **names**, but I do at least recognize people I know well. And sometimes, I'll see someone who reminds me of someone I know. It could be the way they hold their head, or walk or speak....it could be many things. But something gives me a hint, reminds me of someone I know.

Yet, although our gospel reading tells us ‘that their hearts burned within them’ while he was speaking to them, these two disciples weren’t even reminded of Jesus?! All of the things that had happened during what we now call ‘Holy Week,’ including Jesus’ trial and horrifying execution had to still be very much on their mind.

Yet, they notice no resemblance at all between this stranger they met on the road and Jesus?! It is true that the Risen Christ was seen differently by different people, and recognized by differing characteristics...like how I am reminded of people I know well by their posture, their step, their speech or other things.

Mary Magdelene recognized Jesus **when he spoke** her name, and a bit later, Thomas recognized Jesus **when he looked** at his wounds. In today’s story, the Emmaus couple recognized Jesus **through the act** of breaking bread...you could say, through brokenness.

The journey to Emmaus must have been fascinating for these two disciples. It *was* all about Jesus. They were talking about him even before he joined them on the walk. They listened to Jesus talk even before they realized who he was!

When he taught them about scripture, they still didn’t recognize him. They only recognized Jesus when he stopped speaking and teaching, and started *doing*. The thing he started doing that enabled them to recognize him, was to break something and give it to them.

Brokenness....bread and body...it at the heart of Christianity! Brokenness has a way of stripping away layers, all the masks, all the veneer, all the ‘poses’ ...and revealing the real, vulnerable person that’s underneath all the facades we are so good at presenting to the world!

I believe that this is why I find joy and depth in a particular way in young children and the elderly. More often, their unpretentious,

authentic selves are presented. I often see the spirit of our Christ shining through them!

Could be why Jesus enjoyed the company of social outcasts so much? Because they were broken and vulnerable. They used their energy not to build defenses around themselves, not to create a good public image, but simply to survive.

Gill Goulding is a Roman Catholic nun who has worked with people for whom brokenness is a way of life. She says this, "Life is raw on the margins. There is little time or energy to put on the distancing protective masks which society elsewhere seems to put on. Instead, there is a sense of being stripped of everything unnecessary, as people become more aware of their real selves and they devote their energy to surviving. If we want to see Christ, we must know him and love him in his contemporary suffering humanity, particularly amongst the marginalized."

I am definitely not suggesting poverty as a place in life to aim toward in order to grow spiritually! FAR FROM IT. Of course, we are called to empower those who are already in that place in every possible way.

For most of us, this kind of brokenness is not a way of life. We're not on those margins. We may not be rich, but most of us don't live in poverty. Thank God for that. For us, brokenness tends to come in different situations:

\*Like the couple who were married and six weeks later, the groom was diagnosed with cancer.

\*Like a woman or man who centered their life in their spouse, only to be presented with divorce papers after 25 years of marriage.

\*Like the teen whose BFF posted inappropriate pictures and stories about her on social media.

\*Like the family who lost their entire home and its contents after a tornado ripped through their small town.

\*Like the family in whom loved ones have lost their lives to Coronavirus.

\*Like the medical personnel who work long hours during this Pandemic, only to come home to quarantine from family.

\*Like people of all ages who right now are confined in their homes, unable get together physically with their extended family, church family and friends.

All these are times of great brokenness, deep suffering, when our energy is used simply to make it from day to day. There's no spare energy to worry about social niceties or what other people may think! Ours are circumstances which strip *us*.

We find ourselves leaning on other people, depending on their strength, even if it is over the phone or computer. These are times when we need to forget our pride, and accept the help of other people. These are also times when we *can* recognize Jesus. We each recognize him in different ways, through different life events. Just as those first disciples did.

Jesus may not appear in the form we expect. He sure didn't for any of the other disciples. We may not realize that we've been walking with him. Those two disciples on the road to Emmaus did not at first.

However, ALL the disciples who met Jesus after his resurrection *were changed* by the experience! That's how we can know that *our* run-in with the Risen Christ is real! We are *changed* by it! It gives us a

radically different perspective, changes the way we look at life. We become different people, with different values and priorities, even if we only begin to realize we've been with Jesus after the fact!

How will we experience brokenness in this time? How will we become more aware of ourselves? Let the social veneer to be stripped away? Allow ourselves to be vulnerable with other people? Give ourselves permission to admit to what we really think and feel?

During this Coronavirus time, we have so many ups and downs. From hour to hour, day to day, we may have feelings of doom and gloom, as well as times of hope and joy and planning for the future! We may feel afraid, courageous or isolated. Other times, we reach out to others.

This 'Coronavirus Road' on which we are travelling is ripe for an encounter with our Risen Christ, and we WILL be changed by it. Through which experience or person will we see our Risen Christ? Will we recognize Jesus? Let's keep our eyes, ears and hearts open!

The prophet Isaiah, who lived about 800 years before Jesus, describes the result of brokenness, of an encounter with God. Isaiah says, "On this mountain God will make for all peoples a feast. And God will destroy the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. God will swallow up death forever. God will wipe away tears from all faces. This is our God; for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in God's salvation." (*words from Isaiah 25:6-9*)

MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND FOR ME,  
DURING THIS STRANGE CORONAVIRUS JOURNEY AND ALWAYS!

Amen.

