



Easter 5
May 9, 2004

Luke 24:36-43
The Road to Emmaus
3. Blessed Ordinary Joy
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For the last few weeks we have been looking at the events that occurred on Easter along the Road to Emmaus. Two weeks ago we followed Cleopas and another disciple of Christ who were sad and discouraged as they walked down that road because Jesus had been crucified. When a stranger began to walk with them, they did not recognize that this was the risen Lord who walks with us through the disappointments.

Last week we watched as the three men sat down at the table. When the stranger took bread, blessed, broke, and gave it to the men, their eyes were opened as our eyes are opened at the Sacrament of Communion. Immediately after they saw him, Jesus vanished. And immediately Cleopas and the other disciple went back to Jerusalem. They returned to the upper room where they found everyone talking about the appearance of Jesus to Peter as well.

Today's text tells us that while they were discussing this Jesus himself stood among them and said "Shalom." And the disciples were terrified, thinking that they were seeing a ghost. It is interesting that Cleopas and his companion didn't believe Jesus was risen from the dead because they did not see him. The rest of the disciples didn't believe because they did see him. They didn't believe their own eyes.

Wouldn't you have loved to be in that upper room? Haven't you thought that if you could just have seen the risen Jesus with your own eyes, it would be so great because you wouldn't need faith? Seeing is believing, we say. But I wonder if that is true. I don't think that we believe what we see. We see what we believe. If you believe that your boss, your teacher, or your spouse is not good enough, it doesn't matter what they do, you will only see the flaws in their lives. If you believe that Jesus is dead, it wouldn't matter if you were looking right at him. You would still have your doubts.

Jesus at first tries to prove that he is real to his disciples. "Why do doubts arise in your hearts?" he asks. "Look at my hands and feet [which still bore the marks of nails]. Touch me and see. A ghost does not have flesh and bone." But we are told that then they disbelieved for joy.

This belief thing has never been easy. Sometimes people have a hard time believing because something terrible has happened and they wonder how a good God could allow this. But more often the stumbling block to true belief is our joy - we just don't trust it. Joy seems as fleeting, as vaporous, and unreliable as a ghost.

Every life has moments of fleeting intense joy such as a wedding or graduation day, or the day a child is born. Every life has moments of intense grief such as the day a loved one dies, or the day an awful disease is found in your body. But most of our life is spent neither on the mountain tops, nor in the dark valleys. Most of the time life is spent in the flat plains of ordinary days. Your relationships are okay. Your job and health are okay. Your life is okay. It is in these long moments when life is ordinary that a nagging voice from deep within emerges to say, "You are not really happy."

Things aren't awful. You are just vaguely dissatisfied with life. Something is missing, and somehow life just hasn't turned out great. The last Savior you were counting on has died like all the others, and the familiar dreariness of the ordinary has triumphed again. You can cope with this discontent by working a little harder for a promotion. You can get a new house, do a little shopping, buy a new computer or DayTimer that will promise to fix everything. But in your soul, you know that you are just rearranging the ordinary. If any joy comes from these things, you expect that it will be fleeting.

So when at Eastertide the church proclaims, "Jesus is risen from the dead! Everything is different," if you're honest, you are tempted to say, "I just don't see it." Maybe it will help with death and the big crises of life, but what can Easter do about our greatest challenge - the routine? That is what the resurrection is really all about - transforming the ordinary into extraordinary daily moments of joy.

Realizing that he was getting nowhere trying to prove that he was really risen from dead, that it was pointless to keep pointing to his flesh and bones since none of the disciples were going to believe their eyes, Jesus then simply shrugs and says, "Have you got anything to eat?" At first this appears to be a non-sequitur. You can imagine the disciples are now having a hard time believing their ears. "Do we have anything to eat?" But someone finds a left over piece of broiled fish, and so Jesus sits down and eats dinner "in their presence."

This is anything but a throw-away verse of the Bible. This is the goal of the resurrection. As Jesus said after this meal, "Everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms, has been fulfilled." It all comes together over a very ordinary plate of broiled fish.

When Jesus appeared to the two on the Road to Emmaus, their eyes were opened by the sacramental act of breaking and giving bread. But when he appears to the rest of the disciples in the Upper Room, their eyes were opened by the sacramentalizing of a common meal. If you believed, you too would see that his presence with you makes everything holy - as holy as the Eucharist we celebrated last week.

We speak these days about the difference in things that are secular and sacred. Church, we claim, is sacred and work is secular. Maybe we even like to maintain these distinctions because it is more convenient to live differently at work than we do in church. But the Bible knows no such distinction. It claims that the whole world belongs to God its Creator who in Christ has redeemed all things and in whom all things hold together. The biblical distinction is between sacred and profane. All things have a sacred purpose, but anything sacred can be profaned by distorting its purpose. You can profane a word, sexuality, money, work. Or you can see its holy purpose. Nothing is more profane than removing the ordinary from the purposes of Christ.

Do not limit the work of Christ to matters of the spirit. Because the bodily resurrection of Christ affirms that spirit and body, joy and routine, miracle and ordinary can never be separated. The bodily resurrection claims that Jesus cares about bodies that do not work, bodies that are in need of exercise, bodies that are hungry and homeless and tortured, and the bodies of those who are all alone and feel like they are nobody. It is all a spiritual issue!

So are your routines. If eating broiled fish is a spiritual exercise there is nothing in the world that is void of the presence of Christ. When mothers spend their days in mini-vans running errands, Christ is present in the mini-van. If you believed, you would see that. If you saw that, it would change your perspective on the errands. The ordinary would become extraordinary because Jesus is going with you to the grocery store. Jesus is with you as you wipe little noses, clean skint knees, and continue your work till you fall asleep exhausted at the end of another long day. When students knock themselves out to get the

grade, Jesus is there. He is with you as trudge off to the library, as you stay up all night trying to get the lab report to work, as you call home and explain about changing your major. When business people go to the office, Jesus is there. He got to work before you did. The question is: do you see him? Are you even looking for Jesus at work?

Children understand how to do this much better than adults, because we have not yet starved all of the mystery out the world for them. In a child's world an ugly duckling can become a swan, an unwanted stepsister can become a princess, a frog can become a prince. You don't know. You have to kiss him to find out.

Do you see? The risen Christ has restored the mysterious presence of God in all of life. "Holy, Holy, Holy, the whole earth is full of thy glory." This means that anything can happen. Not even the routine is routine. So the secret to living in the ordinary is not to climb out of it for a fleeting moment of joy, but to find abiding joy in the mystery that lies within the ordinary. And the secret to finding that mystery, after Easter, isn't much of a secret at all. It is there in plain sight. But you have to choose to believe to see it. Amen.