

Good Sunday morning from a hill in Rockport!

Yesterday Spring arrived on our hill here in Rockport! We actually sat out on the deck for a while, enjoying the warmth of the sun, listening to the birds chirping in the trees.... That was yesterday. Today, Spring has slipped its heavy sweater back on. There will be no deck sitting this afternoon as there is rain in the forecast for later today, tonight and tomorrow. Sigh.....

Patience is a challenging trait to exhibit sometimes. But patience has become a valuable commodity through these hard days, hasn't it? We want to get back together – for worship, for shopping, for haircuts (!), for eating “out” rather than “in,” for so many activities we took absolutely for granted just a month or so ago. Perhaps learning patience is one of the silent lessons we will learn from this pandemic pandemonium moment of our lifetime.

I remember the day I flew home from Russia in 1994 with three American companions. We had just spent twelve days in the south of Russia, living in conditions none of us had ever experienced in this country. We endured lots of “hardships” – we were told not to drink the water, or use it for any purpose; we learned the hard way that bathrooms were almost a luxury when you were out and about in the city; we experienced the water being turned off for six hours a day in one of the cities we were in – to try to protect the city's aging water pipes for a few more years; we were crowded into buses so tightly that we couldn't have sat down, or even fallen down if we had wanted to....

The day we flew home, we landed in the Atlanta airport the same day as the new international terminal opened. Suitcases were flying off the luggage turnstiles like tennis balls out of a shoot. The underground trains would slow down for passengers to board, but not open their doors and just take off again like bullets down those dark train tracks. My three companions and I just stood there smiling, patiently, while other Americans were screaming, waving their arms angrily, and stomping their feet. One of us said quietly, and I'm not sure which one of us it was, “These people need to go to Krasnodar.”

The four of us learned patience in Russia. What are we learning now from this unthinkable, incredible, death dealing pandemic in our midst? I hope, and pray, we are learning patience so not so many of us have to keep dying.....

I'll be posting my sermon this morning on my Facebook page – freerangepastor. Take a listen and a look, if you like.... And yes, I DO need a haircut.....

Blessing to all on this “waiting for Spring to arrive again” day..... Susan

**A simple online worship service for Sunday, April 26, 2020**  
**The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter**  
**as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**  
**Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**



**Opening Prayer**

At unplanned moments, O God, you come and walk beside us.  
You accompany us into unknown places.  
You challenge us to look at things in new ways.  
You remind us that we are never alone.  
We begin again, as if for the first time,  
doing our best to sense your presence  
all around us. Amen.

**“A brief prayer based on Hebrews 11:1”**

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for.”  
Now doubt is the assurance that we can never know  
all there is to know about faith,  
the conviction that faith is not a fact  
but an unseen promise.  
Amen.

**A Reading of Scripture – Luke 24:13-35**



Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but **their eyes** were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?”

He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”

Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then **their eyes** were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.” Luke 24:13-35

## A sermon based on Luke 24:13-35 “their eyes”



Will you pray with me. Wise God, we come to you in these moments of reflection *thinking* we can see you all around us, but some of us not *really* believing it... until a twinkle in someone’s eye catches ours, or a thought of you crosses our minds during a hymn or a prayer, or you visit us in other ways, in the breaking of bread around a table of friends and loved ones. Commune with us in these moments, O God, for we are surely hungry for you this day, in ways we could not have imagined in the past. Amen.

I love the story from the Gospel of Luke I just read to you! In doing my preparations for preaching this week, I discovered many preachers of the Gospels like this story! It is so FULL in so many ways – it’s very visual, meaning it’s easy to envision the scene; it’s full of themes and sub-themes, so it’s rich for preaching material – we could focus on this passage for a “month of Sundays” and find new meaning in its verses each week. And finally, the passage is full of US, as we are all too often as blind and as unknowing as Cleopas and his friend.

There is also the suggestion that the whole story of the walk to Emmaus is the story of the wider church – that Cleopas and his friend walking along ARE the church. They are the Sunday worship service. They are all of us together, and as individuals as we walk our faith journeys.

In the wider church, in our Sunday services (when we can get back to them!), and in our faith journeys we go along searching for God – sometimes finding, sometimes doubting, sometimes missing God altogether – when God is right there smack dab in the middle of us – in our difficult times, in the breaking of bread in our sanctuary and around our tables at home, in the middle of the night when the journey seems so dark and God seems nowhere to be found.

“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) Cleopas and his companion were at least able to look back and remember that “something” was different about the stranger who appeared suddenly in their midst. “Something” was different. I can remember very clearly the first time I read this story. I was in my first year of seminary. As most of you know, I had never read any of the Bible before going to seminary. I read their words, “Were not our hearts burning with us...” and I thought of the first time I read the words of Hebrews 11:1-3 about faith while I stood in my father’s hospital room in 1990. Was not MY heart burning within me, I recollected, as I read those words? “Something” was different about them. I just couldn’t put my finger on exactly what it was back then, five years before the thought of going to seminary ever came into my consciousness.

And so Cleopas and his friend told the disciples and their companions “what had happened on the road [to Emmaus], and how Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.” (Luke 24:35) This story, all the stories about Jesus, many of the stories in the Bible are SO rich when we open ourselves to be participants in them.

I certainly wasn't able to do that for the first forty or so years of my life. If we read the stories of the Bible only as literature, if we get bogged down in whether they're all historically accurate or not, if we read only with eyes of reason, then it is very difficult to see our part in the stories or to have them come alive at all. But just as our daily lives are not always “reasonable,” our spiritual lives are more than “reasonable,” too. “Were not our hearts burning within us!” in those moments when we couldn't make sense of what was going on at the time?

Cleopas and his friend show us the way to clearer vision in their becoming part of the story and then sharing it and living it with the disciples and their companions. How do WE do this? How do we become part of the story, share it and live it with one another?

The word for all of this for Christians is the “E” words – you know it – evangelism. It's the word that many of us mainline Protestants have a hard time spitting out. Another word for evangelism is “Christian witness.” I found a wonderful example of this witnessing. It struck so close to home that I laughed out loud when I first read it.

This is the story of “James T. Laney, former president of Emory University, telling about being on an airplane where he experienced Christian witness. He got on the plane and nodded to the man who sat in the seat next to him. He appeared to be a businessman, perhaps returning home for the weekend after a long business trip.

No sooner had the plane taken off than Laney noted that the man pulled out a large Bible and a pen and a notebook. “Oh, no,” Laney thought to himself. “Here I've got a two-hour flight and I'm seated next to a religious fanatic.”

And so Laney became absorbed in his work, turning his eyes away from the man, knowing that if he engaged in conversation, he could be trapped there for the rest of the flight with this religious fanatic trying to convert him.

But the man was fully absorbed in his Bible study – reading, taking notes. Laney looked at him out of the corner of his eye. He certainly appeared to be a normal person. He started wondering why the man was so intently reading the Bible. He glanced at him a couple of times, but the man never looked up.

Finally, Laney said, “I notice that you are studying the Bible.”

The man said, “Yes, I am.”

Then that was all. Laney spoke again, “I'm a Methodist minister myself.”

“Really?” said the man, not all that interested.

“Yes, I notice you are reading the Bible.”

“Yes,” the man replied again tersely.

“I was wondering why you are reading the Bible,” said Laney.

“You have a problem with that?” the man asked.

“No, no problem,” said Laney.

“I'm preparing my Sunday school lesson,” said the man.

“Really?” said Laney. “Like I said, I'm a Methodist minister.”

“Well, good talking with you. I've got a tough lesson to present tomorrow. We're studying 1 Kings,” said the man.

Laney, in relating this story later, said, “THAT’S evangelism! If we could just go on about our business, being Christian in the best way we know how, we will make evangelism worthy of the name.”

We ought to live in such a way, going about our Christian business, so that the world is made curious. The world will ask, and then we can tell.”<sup>1</sup>

I have to say I’ve experienced both sides of that story – I’ve been on a plane seated next to someone who I was sure was going to try to convert me if I engaged in conversation. And on other occasions I’ve been the one taking out my Bible and pen and notebook to work on a sermon on a plane while wondering what the person sitting next to me thought of my “religious behavior.”

Jesus came up beside Cleopas and his walking companion and questioned them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” (Luke 24:17) They didn’t recognize who he was, but they began their “Christian witness” right then. They told him the story of what had just happened in Jerusalem. Then Jesus told THEM the story, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” (Luke 24:27)

Telling stories, asking questions, listening, being open to surprise in biblical texts and questions – these are all part of the experience of being witness to the message of Christ. But there’s more to it than even all of that. There is the “doing” of Christian witness. In the midst of the awful pandemic we are experiencing right now, “Christian witness,” faithful witness of many origins is happening every day.

As Jesus didn’t identify himself to Cleopas and his companion, neither do we need to identify ourselves. Jesus’ identity became known to Cleopas and his companion in his actions of blessing the bread at table, breaking it and giving it to them. Our identity as witnesses to our faith comes through *our* actions and *our* words and the stories we tell.

Theologian, John Dominic Crossan, wrote in his book *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, “Emmaus never happened. Emmaus always happens.”<sup>2</sup> May we come to find ourselves on the road to Emmaus on these hard days and recognize Jesus as the risen Christ in all of his appearances among us.

Let the people say, “Amen.”

### **To hold in our prayers this day.....**



From our most recent bulletin and more....

Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, Harriet Williams, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Sally Harjula, Elliot, Trish Perry, April DeVarney, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, George Ng, Eve Anderson, Doug and BJ Thomson, Heather Van Buskirk, and Muriel’s grandson Jared.... and all those affected by the coronavirus and the families of those who have died from the virus. *Please send me the names of those you would like for me to add to this list next Sunday!*

---

<sup>1</sup>In *Pulpit Resource*, Vol. 30, No. 2, Year A, April/May/June, 2002, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Cited in *Homily Service*, Vol. 35, No. 5, Year A, April, 2002, p. 23.

**A Pastoral Prayer for Sunday, April 26, 2020**  
**from Dwight D. Eisenhower on the occasion of his Inaugural Address,**  
**January 20, 1953**

“My friends, before I begin the expression of those thoughts that I deem appropriate to this moment, would you permit me the privilege of uttering a little private prayer of my own: Almighty God, as we stand here at this moment my future associates in the Executive branch of Government join me in beseeching that Thou will make full and complete our dedication to the service of the people in this throng, and their fellow citizens everywhere. Give us, we pray, the power to discern clearly right from wrong, and allow all our words and actions to be governed thereby, and by the laws of this land. Especially we pray that our concern shall be for all the people regardless of station, race or calling. May cooperation be permitted and be the mutual aim of those who, under the concepts of our Constitution, hold to differing political faiths; so that all may work for the good of our beloved country and Thy glory. Amen.”

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9600>

**A Benediction**



*May God bless you and keep you.*  
*May God's face radiate upon you*  
*and flood you with grace and tender mercies.*  
*May God smile upon you always*  
*and cover your life with peace.*  
*Amen.*

**Readings from the RCL (Revised Common Lectionary)**  
**for next Sunday, May 3, 2020**



Acts 2:42-27; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10

**Words to ponder today.....**

“In the Spring, I have counted 136 different kinds of weather inside of 24 hours.” ~ Mark Twain  
“Spring is when you feel like whistling, even with a shoe full of slush.” ~ Doug Larson