

April 23, 2017

Luke 24:13-35

In his book *The Magnificent Defeat*, Fredrick Buechner has this to say:

“Sacred moments, the moments of miracle, are often everyday moments, the moments which, if we do not look with more than our eyes or listen with more than our ears, reveal only ... a garden, a stranger coming down the road behind us, a meal like any other meal. But if we look with our hearts, if we listen with our being and our imagination ... what we may see is Jesus himself.”

In my life, I’ve found that these words of Fredrick Buechner’s do ring true; profoundly, true. Ordinary moments are sometimes sacred moments. Sometimes we do have to look with more than our eyes and listen with more than our ears. And sometimes there is more to knowing than understanding with your intellect.

Sometimes unexpectedly, a sunrise, a piece of music, the touch of a loved one’s hand, the sound of a child’s laugh, the call of an owl, a meal shared become the means of grace, sacrament, a promise that the holy is near, Christ is present.

Jesus had died, Luke’s gospel tells us. There was no doubt about that. And with him had died the hope and faith of his disciples, his dear friends and family. The brutal finality of his crucifixion had brought a devastating end to their growing sense that that the things he said were true, that he was the truth, and that in his presence they were somehow in the presence of God. All of that ended when he died on a Friday afternoon.

A few women had returned from the place he had been buried, claiming the tomb was empty, and a few of the twelve had claimed to see him. But for the most part, his friends were still experiencing the shock of what had happened and the grief that their friend was gone. Two of them, later in the day of Easter Sunday, began a dusty walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were heading home, their

heads hung low; believing that their shared experiences with Jesus, and the love they had known in him were now done and over with for good.

What I find so remarkable about this story is just how ordinary it all seems. These two disciples could be any of us. The road to Emmaus could be any road. It could be the common way you and I cope with loss and grief. Emmaus could be the ordinary way you and I deal with life's dead-ends and deep disappointments. Don't you think?

As these two walk along, talking about what had happened, the traumatic events of Jesus' betrayal and arrest, the horror of his crucifixion and death, they are joined by a stranger. It's odd, isn't it, that they didn't recognize him? They continue to talk about what happened, explaining it to him. "Are you the only one in Jerusalem who doesn't know about it?" they ask him. And then, as the sun begins to set, they extend hospitality to the stranger, inviting him to share their evening meal and spend the night with them. It is when he broke the bread for them, in a way reminiscent of the time he fed the multitude, powerfully reminiscent of the way he had broken bread and shared it with his disciples on the night he was arrested – as he broke the bread, they recognized him. It was Jesus.

I'm drawn to the fact that in this story the risen Christ comes to two people in the midst of an ordinary, very human activity: taking a walk, dealing with a terrible loss. They aren't looking for him. They don't even recognize him. Faith, this story seems to suggest, does not come as a result of our intellectual inquiry or struggle with ideas. Faith is not a product of studying theology, memorizing scripture, reciting creeds – not that there isn't good to be found in all those things. Indeed there is evidence to suggest that faith is not produced all that much by churchgoing either – I mean, how many of us – though we're here most Sundays – out there in the world live more "in fear" than we do "by faith"? Be honest.

Friends; faith is a gift. Faith is what happens when, by God's grace, the risen Christ confronts us in the middle of life and an ordinary experience becomes a sacred experience, an ordinary moment becomes a holy moment, and a truth that's deeper and more profound than what our minds can understand becomes momentarily clear.

Maybe, through one of our own ordinary experiences in life, you and I know something about receiving this gift of faith? Maybe we know something about the healing of grief and the reappearance of hope? Maybe after experiencing one of our own dead-ends and deep disappointments in life, we too have had the experience of a new-beginning and have felt the possibility of renewal? Maybe we have had our own surprising, unexpected encounter with the risen Christ?

Have you ever wondered what it was about those two disciples on the road to Emmaus that prevented them from recognizing Jesus, the one whom they must have yearned to see more than anyone else in the whole world? After all, they've heard the resurrection stories told by the others; the women who found the tomb empty, the eleven in Jerusalem to whom he had appeared. But, when he did appear to these two they did not know it was him. Why is that?

The answer, perhaps, is as simple as the fact that they did not expect to see him. These two were not among the women who had witnessed to their loyalty and had risked the wrath of the Roman guards by going to the cemetery to visit Jesus' tomb. And they were not among the inner circle of his disciples who had remained in Jerusalem, afraid yet still hoping. No. These two were heading away from Jerusalem, running from danger, believing that this whole crazy Jesus-experience was over for them. That ship had sailed. They were going back home because, they must have thought, they had nowhere else to go.

As they neared their hometown of Emmaus, more and more, they were walking on familiar ground. And this stranger who had joined them on the road was there walking alongside them, talking with them, teaching them. Still they did not recognize this stranger as their friend, the Risen One. They passed the field where, as kids, they'd played ball; ... the synagogue where, with the village's old rabbi, they'd studied Torah; ... turned the corner, arriving at their house, walking up those familiar front steps, they invited the stranger in to join them for supper and stay the night. And still they did not recognize him. In all that was so ordinary and commonplace for them, they did not expect to find Jesus. But then, at their old kitchen table with its metal legs and arborite table-top, the stranger took, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to them. And in that instant, their eyes were opened and they recognized the one who was and is their Friend and not a stranger.

“Christ of the common place,” you could call this Jesus who for us, it would seem, is most easily overlooked. Like those two disciples who came from and in their grief returned to Emmaus, we, too, perhaps are not prepared to see and recognize in our lives this same “Christ of the commonplace.” This is the Christ who, as he did with them, walks with us on our life's common road, speaks to us in and through our life's common things. Then in the most commonplace action of all – breaking bread, together, in an ordinary meal – opens eyes to his presence. Then, the one whom we had seen only as a stranger is revealed to us to be our Living Lord and Risen Saviour; our best and truest Friend.

A wonderful preacher from the southern United States, Fred Craddock, was once invited to come speak at a conference in Winnipeg. While he was there, an early October snow storm paralyzed the city. Fred was stuck in his downtown hotel. Everything was shutdown. His host couldn't even make it in from the

suburbs to pick Fred up for breakfast. So for breakfast, not dressed for the weather, Fred walked to a crowded bus depot café two blocks from his hotel.

As he entered the place, Fred says, somebody scooted over and let him in a booth. A big man with a greasy apron came over to the table and asked him what he wanted. Not knowing what they served, Fred asked to see a menu.

“What do you want with a menu?” the man asked. “We have soup.”

“Then I’ll have soup,” Fred said. Just what he wanted – soup for breakfast.

The man brought the soup and Craddock says it was an unusual looking soup. It was grey, the colour of a mouse. He did not know what was in it, but he took his spoon and tasted it. Awful! “I can’t eat this,” he said to himself. So he sat in that crowded café warming his hands around the bowl, railing against the world, stuck in Winnipeg. (My “Emmaus,” as you know.)

Then, the door of the café opened and someone yelled “Close the door,” and she did. A woman came in. She was middle-aged, had a coat, but no covering for her head. Someone scooted over and let her in a booth. The big man with the greasy apron came over and the whole café heard this conversation:

“What do you want?”

“Bring me a glass of water.”

The man brought the water, took out his pad and repeated the question.

“What do you want.”

“Just the water.”

“Lady, you gotta order something.”

“Just the water.”

The man’s voice started rising, “Lady, I’ve got paying customers here waiting for a place, now order!”

“Just the water.”

“You order something or you get out.”

So, she got up. The people at the table where she was seated got up, people all around got up, the folks that let Fred sit at their table got up, Fred got up, and they all started moving towards the door.

“OK,” the big man with the greasy apron said, “She can stay.” And everybody sat down. He even brought her a bowl of soup.

Fred asked the man sitting next to him, “Who is she?”

“I never saw her before,” he said, “but if she ain’t welcome, ain’t nobody welcome.”

Then, Craddock said, all you could hear was the sound of people eating soup. “Well, if they can eat it, I can eat it,” he said to himself. He picked up his spoon and started eating the soup.

“It was good soup. I ate all of that soup. It was strange soup. I don’t remember ever having it. As I left I did remember eating something that tasted like that before. That soup tasted like bread and wine.” //

Fredrick Buechner said it very well, indeed.

“Sacred moments, the moments of miracle, are often everyday moments, the moments which, if we do not look with more than our eyes or listen with more than our ears, reveal only ... a garden, a stranger coming down the road behind us, (a woman in a coat with no hat on her head, seeking shelter from a storm), a meal like any other meal. But if we look with our hearts, if we listen with our being and our imagination ... what we may see is Jesus himself.”

Yes, sometimes we do have to look with more than our eyes and listen with more than our ears, don’t we? And, often, there is more to knowing than understanding with your intellect.