

Easter 3-April 23, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Parish

Luke 24:13-35

Their Eyes were Opened Sermon by Pastor Randall Questad

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord, our Rock, and our Risen Redeemer. Amen

Without much question, the biggest event that has happened in my lifetime and many of yours too was the terrorist attacks that we associate with the numbers 9-11. By biggest event, I mean that it affects so many people in some way even if you didn't know one of the nearly 3000 people who perished on that day you couldn't not have felt some deep emotion after hearing about what happened on that day. My memory does not do well retracing each of my steps this week, but as I suspect for many of you too, you know exactly where you were on 9-11. I remember clearly that I was one of about a dozen people who got into one of two vehicles at Flying J in Sioux Falls and left early one morning to attend an agronomy field school at the University of Minnesota, Waseca. By the time we got to Fairmont, Mn., it was time to take a break to stretch and use the restrooms. In our vehicle, we were just visiting each other. In the other vehicle, they had the radio on and when we unloaded in Fairmont at the truck stop, the riders in the vehicle who had the radio on quickly met up with us and asked, "Have you heard what happened in Manhattan?" In our ignorance, we responded, "What things?" They relayed to us what information was available at that time. I recall our uncertain and fearful emotions. We debated if we should continue or turn back. But we went on. That evening in our motel rooms, we were glued to the news reports to learn more about the events of that day, and we were uneasy about going to sleep that night as we wondered what might happen next.

Although we are in the third week of Easter, the gospel reading that you just heard was an event that happened later in the day on the first Easter. There is no greater event in all of history that has affected more people than Easter. Fortunately, we are no longer avoiding Jesus on Easter as most did on the first Easter and our Easter worship services are designed to be joyful. But on the first Easter, this was not the case. Jesus had died on the cross and was buried in the tomb and after three days he was not in the tomb just as he said would happen. But no one was joyful. No one's first instinct was to believe what Jesus said would happen. We were told that the women who came to the tomb were first overcome with fear. The disciples who had locked themselves behind heavy doors were much like us on 911 and fearful of who was going to perish next.

Today's post Easter account is no different. Cleopas and his traveling companion had left the scene of the events of Holy Week and Easter and knew exactly where they were on Easter. They were walking the 7-mile road that leads from Jerusalem to Emmaus. We don't know if that was where they lived or if that was where they wanted to go to feel safer. We do know that these two were not celebrating a risen savior. The two of them were discussing with each other the events that had just happened. The Greek word for their exchange of words was more like they were debating what had just happened. It was then that Jesus seemed to appear out of nowhere and began to walk with them. Jesus could have announced who he was, or he certainly was capable of revealing himself to them as they walked. But he didn't. He kept their eyes from recognizing him. Jesus was not ignorant as those of us who were in the vehicle without the radio when we asked, "What things?" regarding the events of 9-11. Jesus asked the same question of Cleopas and his traveling partner, just to hear what they would say. Much of what they said was accurate. But when they explained to Jesus that it was the chief priest and leaders that handed Jesus over to be crucified, they had failed to realize they too were the betrayers of Jesus who was now very much alive again and walking with them.

They even said out loud to Jesus that this was the third day after the crucifixion, but they failed to remember that Jesus had told them after three days he would rise. They told Jesus that the story that the women told astounded them, but they didn't say they believed the story of the women. There is no question that Jesus was disappointed with the unbelief of these two who were disciples of Jesus. Jesus called them foolish and slow of heart. But Jesus doesn't give up on them. These two could not open their eyes to see Jesus on their own. It would take something more from Jesus. And Jesus delivers.

In the remaining miles of walking to Emmaus, Jesus started from the beginning of scriptures in Genesis and went through every book of the Old Testament up to Malachi and told them how all of these scriptures pointed to Jesus. But their eyes still weren't opened. One of my favorite Old Testament scholars is Chad Bird. He does a wonderful job doing what Jesus was attempting to do that day by connecting every story possible in the Old Testament with Jesus. Chad Bird said there are only two things to keep in mind when studying the Old Testament. Number one, remember all stories in the Old Testament about Jesus. Secondly, refer to number one.

What was left for Jesus to do to open their eyes? They were eyewitnesses to the events. They were told what would happen after three days. The women told them what had happened. Jesus appeared to them. Jesus did a comprehensive bible study of the scriptures. And yet they were still blind. Jesus acted as if he was going to leave them, but there was something about this man that was different from any other man they had met and they urged him to stay with them. When Jesus was in their house, they did not serve him, but instead Jesus took the bread, blessed, and broke it and gave it to them. It was at that very moment their eyes were opened. This was not the Lord's Supper, but it sure sounded familiar to them, and it was these words that Jesus said that opened their eyes.

After having their eyes opened when Jesus stayed with them, you might think it would make sense for Jesus to at least spend the night with them and share breakfast together. But instead, Jesus vanishes from the scene and leaves these two talking to each other again, but this time they were not sad. They are full of faith. It was after Jesus broke bread with these two that they remembered how their hearts burned within themselves when Jesus was going through scripture with them. There was something that was started then, but it wasn't completed until Jesus stayed with them and broke the bread with them.

The story of Clepas and his traveling companion on the Road to Emmaus makes clear to us that our work as a parish is also not over on Easter. Like Jesus, we need to be walking side by side with our neighbors who may not recognize who Jesus is at first. We need to be a parish that continues to provide Sunday School education for youth to teach them the stories of Jesus so that they will have their eyes opened and know who Jesus is to them. We as a parish need to still provide camping experiences for older youth who might have their eyes opened to who Jesus is by riding side by side on a horse in the wide-open prairies of western South Dakota. We as a parish need to invite graduating high school seniors back into church before they move on to their next venture in life and pray for them knowing that we go with them by sending them off with the warmth of a quilt and let them know that Jesus walks with them. And our parish will continue to be a place where eyes are opened through the sacrament of baptism and through the breaking, blessing, and giving of bread in the Lord's Supper.

Jesus left Cleopas and his companion after their eyes were opened. Where did he go? Jesus appeared again this week in this house of worship and stayed with us to open your eyes to recognize that it is Jesus who died and rose again for you. Jesus walks with you, forgives you, and gives you eternal life.

And for that we are filled with joy. Amen