

April 26th, 2020/Third Sunday of Easter

Welcome and Announcements

Opening Sentences

As the sun set over the village of Emmaus,
Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it,
And gave it to his friends.

*Then their eyes were opened
and they recognized him.*

Today we gather around table, font, and pulpit—
Hoping, trusting to behold the risen Lord.

*May our eyes be open
To recognize Jesus in our midst.*

Prayer of Confession

Living Lord,
by the power of your Spirit,
you are present among us.
Yet, like the first disciples,
We fail to see you in our midst.
We do not realize you are walking beside us.
We do not notice you in everyday encounters,
for we are consumed by our own concerns.
We do not recognize you on our streets
or at our tables,
for our expectations are too limited
to imagine all the ways you dwell among us.
Open our eyes to perceive you in our midst,
so that—seeing you clearly—
we might follow you faithfully. *Amen.*

(Music)

Luke 24:13-35

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then 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?” ¹⁹He 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, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But 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. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and 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. ²⁴Some 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.” ²⁵Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But 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. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They 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?” ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

(Music)

“Apprehending the Holy”

I want to begin this morning by asking those of you who are parents and grandparents to reflect back on what it was like to look deeply into the face of your newborn for the first time.

Yvette Schock, a Lutheran minister in Spokane, Washington, recently said, “Lately, I have spent hours each day surveying my newborn son’s face. While he sleeps I examine his fine eyelashes, note the flush of his cheek, and watch as his expressions swiftly shift. When he’s awake, I covet the moments when he stares into my eyes. When his gaze wanders elsewhere, I turn to see where he is looking, trying to discern what captures his attention.

He can see clearly only what is eight to 12 inches from his face. But this does not keep him from searching beyond this field of clear vision, and he often stares intently where I don’t think there’s much for him to see at a bare wall, or a particular shelf in our bookcase, or the base of an unremarkable lamp. His attention draws mine, and I see details I would not otherwise have noticed. The bare wall is in fact marked by a broad stripe of shadow. On the bookshelf, a star of light winks from the corner of a glossy dust jacket. The slender, straight lines of the lamp’s base create a black-and-white pattern on the wall.”¹

I share this with you because much of what passes into the range of our sight doesn’t register. This is a matter of survival. We begin life unable to organize and categorize our sensory experience. Our blurry, weak vision as infants protects us from an assault of incomprehensible light, color, and movement. But eventually we develop the capacity to cope with all of these stimuli by focusing on some of them and ignoring the rest. Our eyes drink in the world around us, but our brains develop filters so that we actually see only the necessary things.

I think this is interesting because in their conversation on the road to Emmaus, I imagine the two disciples sifting carefully through what they themselves have seen and what they have heard from others throughout the week before. They are trying to discern the necessary things to help them understand what has

¹ Yvette Schock, *Luke 24:13-35*, The Christian Century, April 22, 2014

happened—and what they are to do in the wake of such loss and disappointment.

When a fellow traveler approaches and asks what they are discussing, they list for him those “things about Jesus of Nazareth” that seem most important: Jesus’ identity and betrayal, their hopes, the rumors of his resurrection, and the tomb—found empty, just as the women reported. It is a decent summary of the important details, but the traveler finds it lacking. He reminds them at length of the promises of redemption found in the scriptures. Yet the disciples still do not recognize that the one speaking to them is Jesus. They look, but they do not see.

Finally, when Jesus sits with the disciples at their table, takes the bread, and blesses and breaks it, their eyes are opened. They recognize the pattern of his movements; they feel the familiar pull of the holy drawing them into communion, embracing them. *They see Jesus.*

Reflecting on this truth, Yvette Schock also said, *“The summer after my sophomore year in college, I moved home to work and save money in preparation for living abroad the next semester. I also volunteered at a fair-trade gift store operated by the local Mennonite congregation. Occasionally the church’s pastor came in to do the books or check inventory, and we often fell into conversation. After two years of global studies and economics courses, I was full of righteous zeal for every kind of cause for justice. I’m sure I spoke passionately about current events, environmental catastrophe, and all manner of situations of injustice around the world.*

*Then one day, Pastor Long asked a question I could not answer: ‘What examples of injustice do you see around here?’ After a pause—long enough to allow me to respond, but not so long as to unkindly underscore my inability to—he began to speak about the migrant workers in the nearby orchards and fields of eastern Washington. He told me about the poverty they left behind in their home countries and the discrimination and harsh living and working conditions they faced in the United States. As he spoke, my eyes were opened: I realized that I had spent the first 18 years of my life **not seeing** a whole group of people who shared space in the place I called home. Even when I returned*

home with a growing passion for justice, the blinders that had limited my vision in my childhood and youth remained.”²

She concluded: *“I cannot fault the disciples for not recognizing the risen Christ. Left on my own, my vision is like theirs, or like my infant son’s—blurred, blocked, and incomplete. My conversation with Pastor Long was, for me, an Emmaus experience: a moment of stark recognition that altered my perception. It changed what and who I noticed that summer.”³*

This, of course, is just one person’s experience. But my vision (our vision) needs retuning all the time. So I find comfort in the Emmaus story: Jesus does not leave the disciples on their own, blind to the reality of resurrection. In their grief they cannot see enough to go looking for him, so he finds them. He walks with them and takes a place at their table—though they do not recognize him. In the breaking of bread, he opens their eyes to his presence with them all along. And the filters are stripped away—filters of disappointment, loss, isolation, and fear that kept them from seeing.

Meanwhile, back in Jerusalem, Simon has also seen Jesus. When Cleopas and his companion crash breathlessly into the room, they all clutch at one another’s arms, and their words tumble out together: *“Jesus is risen!”* Together they become the seeds of a new community whose seeing has been transformed; together they will continue to witness signs of the resurrection and to see the presence of Christ all around.

(Music)

Prayers of the People

Let us pray, sisters and brothers, for the Spirit of God to move around us and within us today.

Today we lift up your cup of salvation and call upon your name. Today we remember you in the breaking of the bread. The scales fall from our eyes and we

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

remember you – our despair lifts and our hope is rekindled, and our hearts burn with fire.

These are confusing days. Do we open states? Do we stay home? Will my job be there when this is over? Will my child be going to school in the fall? Will I run out of money this month? Can my family help me if I should need it? What will I do if I get sick and don't have insurance?

It's hard to find our bearings. Life feels adrift, and while we are sharing the experience of disorientation, we are not all experiencing the same vulnerabilities. We are in this together, but our journeys are uniquely our own.

We are in the same storm, but not in the same boat.

Your ship could be shipwrecked, and mine might not be.

Or vice versa.

For some, quarantine is optimal. A moment of reflections, of re-connection, easy in flip-flops, with a cocktail or coffee.

For others, this is a desperate financial and family crisis.

For some that live alone, they're facing endless loneliness.

While for others it is peace, rest, and time with their mother, father, sons and daughters.

Some are bringing in more money to their households than they were working.

Others are working more hours for less money, due to pay cuts or loss in commissioned sales.

Some families of four just received \$3,400 from the stimulus package, while other families of four saw \$0.

Some were concerned about getting a certain candy for Easter, while others were concerned if there would be enough bread, milk, and eggs for the weekend.

Some want to go back to work because they don't qualify for unemployment and are running out of money.

Others want to jail those who break quarantine.

Some are at home spending two to three hours a day, helping their child with online schooling, while others are doing the same on top of a 10–12 hour workday.

Some have experienced the near death of the virus, some have already lost someone from it, and some are not sure if their loved ones are going to make it.

Others don't believe this is a big deal.

Some have faith in God and expect miracles this year.

Others say the worst is yet to come.

We are not in the same boat. We are going through a time when our perceptions and needs are completely different.

Each of us will emerge, in our own way, from this storm. It is important to see beyond what is seen at first glance. Not just looking, actually seeing.

We are all on different ships during this storm, experiencing a very different journey.

Lord, walk with us along our roadways and help us to always seek you out, to recognize your face, to keep our hope alive and remember you when we share bread with each other. Warm our hearts. In the name of your Son Jesus, who taught us to pray saying....

Charge and Benediction

