

**Weekend of Sunday, April 26, 2020**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year A**  
**First Reading: Acts 2:14a, 36-41**  
**Second Reading: 1 Peter 1:17-23**  
**Gospel Reading: Luke 24:13-35**  
**Sermon Title: “Later That Same Day”**

## **Theme**

*The colorful story of Jesus’ appearance to two disciples on the road to Emmaus answers the question of how Jesus is to be recognized among us. Here, he is revealed through the scriptures and in the breaking of bread.*

## **Text**

<sup>13</sup>Now on that same day [when Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene,] two [disciples] were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup>but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup>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?” <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>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.” <sup>25</sup>Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” <sup>27</sup>Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

<sup>28</sup>As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup>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?” <sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” <sup>35</sup>Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

## Sermon

Welcome to this Third Sunday of Easter. We have gotten very far. According to the Gospel Reading, the setting is *later that same day*; Easter Day that is.

I hope you noticed that for the first time in like seven weeks, the Gospel Reading is not from the Gospel of John. We'll be back in John next weekend. But for this weekend we are in the Gospel of Luke, the 24<sup>th</sup> Chapter, the last chapter in his Gospel. I guess, since Luke also wrote Acts, he felt he could express the Resurrection and Ascension narratives into this one final chapter.

Chapter 24 begins with the Easter Sunday morning discovery of the empty tomb and ends with the Ascension of Jesus – all on the same day. But today, somewhere in the middle of Chapter 24, *later that same day*, Easter Sunday, we find two disciples, likely second-tier disciples, one named Cleopas and the other not named, as they walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

Luke didn't tell us why they're traveling, what their agenda was, why they left Jerusalem, or why they were headed for Emmaus. Maybe they left in fear of the Jews and the Romans as John indicated in his Gospel. Maybe they left in despair. Maybe left because they didn't know what to do, now that everything had changed.

I imagine them traveling with their heads down; like we shop in the supermarkets these days, behind a mask and unwilling to make eye contact.

While on the road to Emmaus, the two met up with a stranger, and I can't help but wonder if he seemed a little familiar to them, like maybe they had met him somewhere before but can't quite place it. The three of them talked as they walked, and the two disciples didn't seem to understand what had happened to their Lord Jesus back in Jerusalem. But oddly, the stranger did and so he tried to explain things to them, but before they knew it they had arrived at their destination.

The stranger would have traveled on, but since it was late, the disciples invited him to come in and eat with them. The stranger accepted, though it turns out that he may have been the one doing the inviting all along.

Surely, we think, when they sat down to eat it will come back to them where and how they had met this stranger before.

Surely, we think, they will remember other meals they've shared; that bread and fish picnic on the seashore where the 5000 were fed.

Surely, we think, they will remember that last supper in an upper room just days before, when they gathered, where he frightened them with the things he spoke of, things they did not understand and did not want to hear, when he passed the cup and broke the bread. Surely, their eyes will be opened then.

And indeed, it's when he broke the bread; when the flesh of the bread was torn and the crumbs fell onto the table; that was when their eyes were finally opened and they could see who the stranger was and what was happening in their midst.

And then he disappeared.

It seems to me that the church lives today, right here in the middle of Luke Chapter 24, between the discovery of the empty tomb and the Ascension into heaven.

I know we celebrate the birthday of the church on the fiery festival of Pentecost; but I think it could be argued that the church was born here, broken open here with the breaking of the bread.

We weren't there that morning. We didn't see the rolled-away stone or hear the women tell the story. And the great mystery of heaven lies far off, in comprehension, at least, if not in time. So here we are, in the middle. That's where the church lives; gathered around the table, telling old, old stories, breaking bread, and sharing the feast. It's in the scriptures and at the table that the story breaks open for us, and we realize again that life has won.

Sometimes, though, if we are honest, that breaking open means not just rejoicing in the triumph of life, but also *opening our eyes* to the broken places in our world.

Lillian Kahl was a resident of Lake Vista of Cortland where I was chaplain for five years. Though very old and her body had let her down, she watched the news constantly and was very well informed on what was going on in the world and had well-thought-out opinions on most things. It was always interesting to visit her and talk with her.

I visited Lillian Kahl after the 9/11 attacks and she was upset by "all these people shouting "God Bless America." "It shouldn't be God Bless America," she said in disgust, "it should be God Bless the World!" Well, that was eye-opening, I thought.

Lillian is dead and gone, but her words still ring in my ears and rattle around in my head, because she was right.

Carol and I eat more meals together now that we are isolating from our workplaces and working from home, and when we pray our mealtime prayers, we ask God to keep us, our family and friends safe from COVID-19, but we also pray that God will also save the people of the world – all of them!

I tell you that because I think it grieves God every time one of his beloved creatures dies a tragic death. God gave his only Son to die for us, so God knows the pain of death – don't ever think that because God is God, God doesn't know or feel the pain of death. In Genesis, it is written that human beings were created in God's image. I think that is more of a likeness in nature than exterior. So if we are hurt and feel pain, God, no doubt, feels it too.

Living with eyes opened, not unlike the eyes of those two disciples that Easter Sunday evening, means recognizing that this time we live in, here in this middle time between the empty tomb and the perfection of the Kingdom, is a place that is sometimes as filled with pain and grief, as it is with life and love.

So maybe the church becomes the place where those truths are broken open, too. With eyes open, we can see that there is too much injustice in the world, too much pain. With eyes open, we can see that there are too many hungry and too many left out in the cold, too many stricken with illness and without life-sustaining care. Are these strangers welcome at our table? When we open our table again, that is.

One Sunday morning at the little church up north, we were gathered in the fellowship hall as we often were, drinking coffee, catching up on news from the week and thinking about heading to Sunday school classes. There was a commotion underneath one of the tables where I was standing, and I bent to look and discovered a little boy playing matchbox cars with one of the highly respected elders of our congregation, who had crawled under the table in his church clothes.

They *vroomed* their cars up and down the floor, oblivious to the rest of us watching, both of them filled with the delight of playing with the other.

Maybe it's a small thing, playing matchbox cars under the table on a Sunday morning; but when I saw them there, I thought: that's what church should be--a place where, even for a moment or two, life breaks open and joy abounds.

When we do it right, that's what church looks like: sharing meals around potluck tables, crying together at the funeral of a friend, lifting prayers in weekly worship, re-telling the stories of scripture, working for justice, serving together for community and world, suggesting, sometimes loudly, sometimes gently, that maybe there might be another way to live.

That's where the church lives, I think, in this world that is far too broken, offering little glimpses where grace breaks open and we can see that *life* just might win again.

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

I entitled this sermon, "Later that Same Day" because of the context of the Gospel Reading. It is a story about later that same day.

Or is it a story about us, and where we find ourselves, in between the open tomb and the perfection of God's kingdom.

Or is it a story of us having our eyes opened to God's presence among us now.

Or is it our eyes are opened to where God's presence needs to be brought?

It's a good question. I'll leave it with you.

### **Prayer**

God of light and life, break open the good news for us. Meet us here, in this broken world, and remind us again of the power of light over darkness, of life over death. Help us to live with eyes open to the new life you offer us. Help us to live with eyes opened to the pain around us, that we might bring your hope to the world. Grant us peace. Amen.