

On the Road With Jesus. Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Ps. 116:1-4, 12-19;
Luke 24: 13-45
Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church
Rev. David E. Young
Third Sunday of Easter, April 6, 2008

Today's text from Luke is one of the most memorable scenes in the New Testament: Jesus' Easter Walk to Emmaus. Here we have two of the disciples (not 2 of the 12, but 2 others) making their way to the town of Emmaus. One is named Cleopas. The other remains anonymous.

They've decided to leave Jerusalem, presumably heading home after the disaster of the Crucifixion - hopes dashed, dejected and discouraged, carrying with them the report of the strange occurrences of Easter, but still unaware of their true meaning.

Luke tells us that as they were walking along a stranger joined them. Luke tells us what they did not know at the time. The stranger is Jesus. They were kept from knowing who he was.

As the story unfolds Luke gives us another way in which the risen Christ is known to his followers. It wasn't through his physical presence with them as he walked along side them for the 7 miles or so from Jerusalem to Emmaus. It wasn't through his teachings, even though Luke tells us that Jesus reminded them of all the places in the Old Testament that referred to him and to the plan and purpose of his life and his death.

It was after the disciples had invited him to stay with them and share a meal with them. It was as he took the bread and gave thanks to God and broke it that their eyes were opened to know who he was.

Luke tells us that knowing the Risen Christ is a matter of revelation. It is a gift of God. It is through Word (the teaching on the way) and Sacrament (the meal) that the disciples encounter the Lord.

And after the encounter they can do nothing other than race back to Jerusalem with the news. Because the Risen Christ has become real for them they want to share the Good News and witness to their faith.

Faith comes full circle in remembering and sharing.

It is with the Word proclaimed, enacted at the Table and then lived out in our daily activities as Jesus' disciples that he becomes real to us and to others.

As many of you know, I along with Mike and Cathy Starch, Vicki Eden, Val Padgett, Al and Tami Sowle and Roger Stanley, spent a week in Houma, Louisiana, under the auspices of the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance program to continue rebuilding and restoring homes and hope in the lives of those so terribly ravaged by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The PDA village in which we stayed has been overseen for the last several months by Kerry and Kelly Buell, members of Chapel Lane. We had the opportunity to be welcomed by them and see the good work that they have been doing as long term volunteers

We had an incredible week, working on the homes of three different families; hearing their stories and sharing in laughter and tears. We received gifts of grace along the way. We also received the deep felt gratitude and appreciation of total

strangers who happened to see us in our blue shirts and simply wanted to express their thanks for the efforts being undertaken.

Once again, it was an opportunity to remember that our faith is incarnational. That is: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God is known to us in the person of Jesus Christ. He has made God known to us and because of him we know what God is like.

Because of Jesus we follow in paths of service and sacrifice, knowing that through our actions in Jesus' name, others come to experience the love of God too.

Our faith is meant to be outward bound, reaching into the lives of others and striving to convey a message of hope and healing, of caring and a desire that no one ever feel abandoned or forgotten.

I imagine what your life would be like if, this many years after having your home wrecked by Katrina or Rita, you were still waiting for the rebuilding to start. Is it just possible that you might be losing hope?

Would it make a difference to you to see volunteers from across the country coming to your community and staying in temporary shelters working in the name of Christ, with ready and willing hearts and hands?

Because of your efforts in supporting Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and because of the physical presence of Presbyterians and many other people of faith from across the country, wherever there is need, wherever disaster has struck, hope continues to remain alive.

Families share their stories of tragedy and rebirth, and of finding the hidden Christ present in their daily lives. Just like in Luke's story of the walk to Emmaus they speak about how strangers have come up along side of them and shared some of the burden of the day with them. In many cases they have shared meals together with laughter and with love and have come to know that God is present and God is with them even through times of darkness and despair.

This sharing and serving is what we are called to do as Jesus' followers. He is the one who walks with us, day by day, unfolds the Scriptures to us by the power of the Spirit, and gives us his grace.

He is the one who invites us to pass along to others the grace we have received in him.

So often we keep score when it comes to the things that others do for us. When we are invited to dinner – we extend an invitation in return. When we receive a gift or a card – we look for the opportunity to do the same. We want to maintain a balance in the social equation.

When it comes to God's grace there is no way for us to maintain a balance through reciprocity with God. It is a one way action. God lavishes his grace upon us, but there is no way for us to return in kind directly back to God.

Instead, we pass grace along to others. Having received the gift of God's grace and love in Christ we look for opportunities to share the Good News and to meet the needs of others.

To be living examples of the love of God is the goal of our discipleship. It is always our hope that we might be able to convey something of the love, grace and mercy of God to others by the way we interact with them and model our Christian faith before them.

We share the love of God with others in many ways. It doesn't take a trip to Louisiana or another place of human need to authenticate it. It can happen as we break bread with one another, share our story with one another, listen to one another and acknowledge that we simply aren't so very different from one another.

Just as Cleopas and the other disciple were spurred into action by their experience of Jesus through the Word and Sacrament, we too are invited to share our experience with the risen Christ here at Chapel Lane and out into the larger parish of the world.

It is a wonderful thing to know the love of God in Christ in our own lives. It is a humbling and a joyful thing to know that God has been able to use us as his instruments of hope and healing in the lives of others.

Let's keep up the good work because it is God's work being done in and through us as together we spread the news that God is with us and will never leave us or forsake us but is a very present help in trouble.

Thanks be to God!