

“Re-Cognize, Re-Member, Re-Commit”
A First Sunday of Easter 10:00 am
Luke 24:13-35; April 30, 2017
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

The Road to Emmaus

¹³⁻¹⁶ That same day two of them were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was.

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ He asked, “What’s this you’re discussing so intently as you walk along?”

They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend. Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said, “Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard what’s happened during the last few days?”

¹⁹⁻²⁴ He said, “What has happened?”

They said, “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word, blessed by both God and all the people. Then our high priests and leaders betrayed him, got him sentenced to death, and crucified him. And we had our hopes up that he

was the One, the One about to deliver Israel. And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn’t find his body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn’t see Jesus.”

²⁵⁻²⁷ Then he said to them, “So thick-headed! So slow-hearted! Why can’t you simply believe all that the prophets said? Don’t you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?” Then he started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to him.

²⁸⁻³¹ They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on but they pressed him: “Stay and have supper with us. It’s nearly evening; the day is done.” So he went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared.

³²Back and forth they talked. “Didn’t we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?”

I. RECOGNIZE

“But they didn’t recognize him.” He walked with them and talked with them. He listened to their sad story about how their friend and teacher was imprisoned by the authorities and killed—for no good reason—no crime!

He contemplated their despair and sense of lost-ness, even as they journeyed together. For, though they walked from one town to another, they really didn’t know where they were going. For life had completely turned upside down and left them wandering and without purpose.

He challenged and cajoled, and taught them the bible all over again, yet only the slightest light began to dawn, step by step, as they stepped and progressed on their way together.

Cynthia Bourgeault points out that all the appearances of the Risen Christ after the Resurrection have this motif of Jesus not being *recognized* at first. “Mary

Magdalene mistakes him for the gardener. The disciples in Jerusalem mistake him for a ghost. The disciples by the Sea of Tiberias are able to identify him only after he has miraculously heaped their fishing nets full of fish.”

And these guys—and very likely gals—on the road to Emmaus recognize him only in retrospect, as he is breaking the bread, but then also vanishes!

Bourgeault suggests that the walk with Jesus “is at every step of the way a recognition drama.” As *we* walk with Jesus—as his disciples on our own faith journey—“something in us must be able to see, to find our way to who he *now* is.” When we have trouble recognizing him, Jesus is holding a mirror before us to show us that something stands in the way. That we have some looking into ourselves –some work to do!—in order to be able to see him through the light of our *own* hearts.

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord!

That’s where we find him, and *recognize* him—without a shadow of a doubt. With the eyes of our hearts. Something burning within us, strangely curious and familiar. Something yearning to open more and find with joy that the one we’ve been looking for is right in our midst, invited in, at the Table with us—in the walking, talking and breaking bread.

So, what gets in the way of that recognizing? For the disciples, (and I wonder if this isn't true for us as well), Bourgeault posits that it 's very clear: "it's their self-pity and nostalgia. Clearly they are stuck in their story, and their stuckness is what makes them unable to see the person standing right before their faces. They are trapped in the past, filled with self-pity and doubt, and no one can recognize *anything* in this state."

So Jesus rewrites their story for them! Verse by verse he leads them through the scriptures and breaks bread with them and literally changes *how* they see. He teaches them to attune their hearts—to "finally locate their inner homing beacon!"

II. RE-MEMBER

What do we have to let go of in order to truly open the eyes of our hearts? Stereotypes, assumptions about the strangers in our midst? Longheld convictions about what the Bible says. Have we looked at it again closely, lately?

What about the way we've always categorized people, done our programs, made our plans? In our individual lives, our churches, our communities?

Open the eyes, of our hearts, Lord!
To new ideas, new ways of doing things. To re-writing our story, and finding ourselves surprised by the burning within us.

So that we are open to breaking *through* the twin barriers of self-pity and nostalgia that keep us from

having our eyes opened to what is right in front of us—to see Who is walking with us, talking to us and answers the invitation to stay with us into the night.

We *have* been doing several new, creative things, and we might have even been "strangely moved", as the disciples were. And, we *might* not have recognized the new things in our midst!

Our "Colorful Lent," begun back in early March, brought a new aspect to our worship service, as folks of all ages gathered in the back of a sanctuary and colored together *during* the message.

And then, our "colorful Lent" blossomed into a most colorful Easter with a new tradition of flowering the cross. And what a beautiful, collective heart moment that was!

We introduced several new activities in our fellowship and Lenten supper times, to encourage getting to know one another and sharing our stories as fellow pilgrims with a rich and fascinating life path and a wealth of experiences.

We've begun new ministries and missions—delved-into gardens and intergenerational activities and trips; changed up the order of meetings (dessert first at Council now!); collected pop-tarts first and then spaghetti for our Backpack Program.

We're learning new songs together in worship—songs of all *different* styles: New hymns, old hymns we

might not have learned in our youth; contemporary songs; worship offerings from different cultures all around the world! We're trying different ways to move through worship—mixing the order and flow to find what best removes distractions and opens our hearts to the palpable presence of God in our midst.

And, we're gathering in different groupings to sing and play together. I particularly love it when the circle of music sharers around the sanctuary outnumber those sitting in the chairs! We've added drums and bass guitar, and wonderful young voices in our choir and band.

We've also added new worship leaders and voices from the pulpit. Doyle and Molly and Kacie and many others have brought breadth and depth to our spiritual life together. And more is to come! Bob and Marge & Ron, Shawna and the youth, guest speakers from near and far are on the horizon!

We've opened our church home and hosting hearts to more memorial services and lunches than we ever thought possible in one season! We've opened our doors and facilities to new groups for meeting and serving—even dancing! We have sought to recognize the face of Christ in the face of the strangers—friends we haven't made yet.

III. RE-COMMIT

Maybe without even realizing it, we have opened the eyes of our hearts to new ways of doing things—even as

we've continued traditions and doing things we've always done well. We have brought the sacred traditions, the scriptures and teachings forward, and fit them into a new day. We have been open to trying new ways—of trusting the Spirit's leading.

Bruce Epperley says that moving forward began with the Resurrection in profound ways for all Christ's followers, those first disciples and us:

“Resurrection moved the cells as well as the soul of Jesus, and the cells and souls of his followers. They went from the tomb and upper room out into the world, not always knowing where they were going, but trusting God's Spirit to guide the way. Resurrection still gets us out of our comfort zones and calls us to the open road, spiritually, ethically, and sometimes physically.

Resurrection is just as unsettling as crucifixion. Movement and meal lead to revelation, and then Jesus is gone, vanishing from their sight, but leaving them with warmed hearts, lively spirits, and energetic bodies. They are so energized that they walk seven miles back to Jerusalem to share their good news that Jesus is risen and on the road.

After breaking the bread, Jesus vanished from their sight. He may have needed to be on the move as well. For God is not static, imprisoned by yesterday's revelations and the church's creeds and scriptures.

God is alive and on the move, doing new things and sharing new insights with other pilgrims on the journey.

Yes, Christ has risen, but the resurrection calls for a personal response. The resurrection is not an abstract doctrine but a lived reality, discovered on the road with Jesus.

“We are on the road as well. Many of our churches are uncertain about their destinations and worried about the future. We can relate to the Emmaus story. We have heard the good news but wonder how it will be embodied in our congregations at this point in history.

“Wherever we are on the road and at every mealtime, Jesus comes to us, filled with energy and possibility, and the joy of resurrection. We can have new life, and we can be born again, right now at any venue. Let’s keep moving, and chart new adventures, because Jesus walks beside us on the road.”

We will continue to “feel our hearts strangely warmed” if we *keep* opening eyes, ears and hearts, every step of the way. Keep looking in the mirror and asking what is getting in the way from recognizing our homing beacon. Seeing and knowing without a doubt that the one who called us into community together is here, in our midst, among us.

As we move forward through the Season of Easter, may we keep looking for the Risen Christ. In our own hearts—our homing beacon, and in the faces and hearts of those we meet on the road, around our tables and in our sphere. Amen.