

April 30, 2017

The Road to Emmaus, the Next Step

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

SERMON

In the Sundays following our celebration of Easter, we always hear the stories of the encounters with the risen Lord. Last Sunday, was the encounter that Sunday evening with the disciples in the upper room. Jesus coming and showing himself to the disciples so that they might know that he had indeed risen. That story also was, what was added to that story was the next week when Thomas was there. And he received the same gift of that encounter with the risen Lord, that the other ten disciples had received the week before.

This week we also hear about the disciples, followers of Jesus as it says in Luke's gospel. Some of those who traveled with Jesus but was not part of that inner circle. The twelve disciples that had been handpicked to be the witnesses to what Jesus said and did. How they have an encounter with Jesus part of the time without recognizing it. Getting a rehearing of the story of who Jesus was. What the prophet said about him, what Moses said about the coming Messiah and Christ. And it was only when they had stopped for the evening and where ready to have the meal and Jesus took and broke the bread. As he did for these disciples what he had done for the twelve on that night that he was handed over to the authorities when he was arrested.

That new meaning of the sacrament of the body of Christ. It was only at that moment that their eyes were open and they recognized this person that had been with them as the risen son of God. It's very important that they had those encounters. Even though the disciples and some of the followers had been with Jesus through some of his most important teachings. Through some of the miracles that he had done. The healings, the walking on water. That was not enough.

The disciples, the followers were despondent after the crucifixion. Even when the women had come back from that Sunday morning seeing the empty tomb. Having the vision of angels. Even having that first encounter with the risen Lord. The disciples were still perplexed. They were still trying to understand. They had all the teachings. They knew everything that Jesus had done. How he had explained the prophets to them. How they had been with him for the parables and all this. But still they weren't there, where they needed to be.

They needed the next step and that was an encounter with the risen Lord. And how they respond to that. The disciples, Thomas. My Lord and my God. That excitement, that understanding that this Jesus was more than a rabbi, a teacher. Was much more than a miracle worker. He was the son of God. He was the Christ that provides salvation. Not just instruction.

Not just another voice saying follow the law. Now they knew him as the risen Lord. The one who had faced death on their behalf. Who accomplished what they could not do on their own.

And this was a new revelation. This was a new understanding of who the Christ is. Who Jesus was as not only teacher but son of God and savior of the world. Even the disciples on the road to Emmaus when their eyes were opened, they understood that they had encountered the risen Lord. Where the bonds of death were truly broken. And that the one that they had followed lives on. And that meant something for their life. It meant forgiveness. It meant becoming what Jesus had talked so much about. Citizens of the kingdom of God. Where the door to salvation has been opened. And they had been invited to walk through, to be a part of. But it took that moment of encounter with the risen Lord.

And I believe that each of us require the same. And I believe that one of the reasons that you're here on this beautiful Sunday. Well maybe it's not the prettiest Sunday we've had but a nice Sunday. Is because you had that encounter. Now you can sit down and read the scriptures. The Old Testament, the Gospels, the Epistles, Acts. And you can come away having a knowledge, an idea, and an understanding of the Jewish faith, a little bit. The Christian faith, a little bit. Who this Jesus was as he walked the Earth and even the stories of the resurrection. But until you, until I have that encounter with the risen Lord, it's all academic. It's all of the mind. An encounter with the risen Lord is an encounter spirit to spirit. It is an encounter with the truth of what Jesus was accomplishing.

And not only in his life and teaching but in his death and his resurrection. That truth of salvation. That truth of him accomplishing for me, for you what we cannot do on our own. And have that entrance into salvation. And we can have that experience in many different ways. If it were each to tell our story. If we were to think about that contemplate that moment when we had that understanding that this story is true. Where we have encountered the risen Lord. Through others, through worship. Through so many other different ways. Sometimes even as the disciples did with that personal encounter through dreams through visions.

That encounter with the risen Lord is essential for our faith, for our understanding, for being forgiven and reconciled to God. Now I believe that we have moments of encountering Christ, encountering our Savior throughout our lives. Sometimes we recognize it, sometimes it takes us awhile. I believe that we do that together when we come to worship. I believe that there is an encountering of the risen Lord in the life that is manifest in this community that Jesus created called the church, Ecclesia. I believe that when we come together and hear the story. And hear how it is relevant to our lives today, that could be an opportunity for an encounter with the risen Lord. I believe on a more personal and individual level, it's coming to the altar rail to receive the sacrament.

We heard last week about how important that is. That intimate moment with the risen Lord. When we are doing what Jesus told his followers, his disciples to do. Whenever you eat this bread and drink this wine, do this in remembrance of me. When he says that, the disciples, the

twelve, don't fully understand what's about to take place. And how the body and blood of Christ will be his being with us very intimately after his resurrection.

The disciples, the followers who went to Emmaus. That's how their eyes were opened. It wasn't just the story, it was the presence. And whenever we have that opportunity to receive the body and blood of Christ, the bread and wine, is or can be that intimate moment with the risen Lord. An encounter with the risen Lord.

Before I was ordained, and this is interesting for me to say. Before I was ordained, it was more manifest to me. Sometimes when you lead worship, it's difficult to worship. You provide for the people gathered, but it's hard sometimes for me to be worshipping. Because I'm always thinking about what I have to do next. This is a confession and you can absolve me later. But I hope for you, especially as you come to the altar rail to receive the bread and the wine. And it was for me before I was ordained. It is the intimate of moments with the risen Lord. To know that I received the bread, it was the risen Lord saying this is who I am. And you are my brother, sister.

A moment together, a moment of being present and Jesus being present with us. In both the bread and the wine, coming and receiving. How important it is to receive the gift that is given. And the reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins in the body and blood of Jesus. The one who gave his life to accomplish that which we cannot accomplish on our own. That is a most intimate of moments between you and God. I hope it is for you.

Those are two ways. We do that as a community but also that intimate one on one moment in receiving the sacrament. There are other ways of encountering Jesus. In the scriptures, it's Jesus always initiating that moment. He came to the disciples. He walked up on the followers who were going to Emmaus. He was on the shore when they were on the lake of Galilee. Jesus always initiating. But we also have opportunities in our life to put ourselves in position to receive that encounter with the risen Lord.

One of the things that we are asked in this diocese to celebrate today not only Easter three. But it's Beckwith Sunday. Is everybody familiar with Beckwith? Now I know some of you are and you didn't even raise your hand or nod. Come on, Beckwith...There you go. You don't have to be, you know. There you go. (Laughter). Beckwith is a camp and retreat center that is owned and operated by the diocese of the central Gulf Coast. I know it better than anybody in this room because I was the executive director there for four years. But I bring it up in this context in that sometimes we are able to go and put ourselves in a place where encountering Christ the risen Lord is more likely. And Beckwith is one of those places. Either because it maintains that space that sacred space where one can go and be a part of God's creation. Where everything is intentionally geared towards being with God. The programs that are offered. Especially I think summer camp when our young people go and have a time set apart for them. Where they receive part of the story, they receive that opportunity to have the

sacrament. To be apart, even from family, from friends, from school, hopefully from electronic devices. And they have that moment when they have an encounter with the risen Lord. I did.

The reason I am a priest today is because it began with my being a part of an Episcopal camp and retreat center for summer camp. And hearing the story in a new way. And seeing and being a part of that encounter with the risen Lord. And knowing that it becomes personal. It's not just for us old people. It's for all of us. And I learned that at camp. And as the director at Beckwith for four years that opportunity is there and I've seen it. And you see these young people begin to have a new understanding of what it is to go to church. To be a part of the kingdom of God. To encounter one who helps us make it through life.

Beckwith offers that opportunity through Cresi a weekends, through so many of the programs they provide where you can go and immerse yourself in an environment that is conducive to encountering the risen Lord. Through the space itself or through the people who are there. It's... you know I know people who have gone to conferences and retreats and I know some who have gone to Canoga. I'm almost afraid to ask who knows about Canoga. Okay, thank you. (Laughter).

But you know they'll travel you know what is it eight hours to get to Canoga. Every bit of it. It only takes two to get to Beckwith. And you'd think that we'd asked them to travel around the world. There's a great place to eat in Pensacola (Laughter). You can certainly do that, yes. If you want rolls you go all the way to Foley from there. I digress. The point of all this is is that sometimes the risen Lord encounters us. At the point and the moment when God knows that we need that. But as we go through our life, we can also put ourselves in those places and times where we are more likely to encounter our risen Lord. And I encourage you to do that. If not Beckwith, you know other places. To be in that place where you have met the Lord before. To be in that place where you know that there are others also encountered the risen Lord. That can provide that moment of knowing more. Because every encounter with the risen Lord is another step. And every step brings us closer to the home that Jesus provides for each of us.