

Sermon for 8 May 2011  
Easter 3, Year A

+In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Most of us, I suspect remember the story, and have heard a number of reflections on its significance over the years. What has begun to fascinate me only recently about the story, though, is the disciples' lack of recognition up to the point of the meal they shared in Emmaus. We so often call the events we just heard about as "the road to Emmaus", but we forget that the moment that made all the difference for Cleopas and the other disciple didn't take place on the road at all, but at the dinner table.

So what about that long walk they all took together? Our risen Lord was engaging in a ministry that defined his earthly life just as much as breaking bread with his disciples; he was teaching

the meaning of scripture, how the Law and the Prophets pointed to the coming reign of the Messiah. Later, the disciples would acknowledge that they felt their hearts "burning within" them during this conversation, yet the moment of recognition didn't come until that more intimate act at dinner.

Perhaps the disciples' delayed discovery surprises us, but it shouldn't. We are exposed to compelling arguments and weighty evidence of some truth or another all the time, but without some kind of personal experience, the truth sometimes doesn't sink in. We can hear facts and figures about poverty and injustice, but our hearts are rarely moved if we don't see it. We live in a society in which a large proportion of people can hear compelling arguments about some scientific or medical proposition, but refuse to believe the validity of said arguments until they see it first hand (even if the proposition at hand doesn't lend itself to that kind of scrutiny). So, I'm not

suggesting that our difficulty in accepting truths on the basis of persuasive evidence is a good thing, but rather that it's a reality of our condition. We are now—as post-modern people—more skeptical creatures than we've ever been (with regard to science and religion and politics and every other human endeavor), and that's neither an altogether bad nor an altogether good thing.

That being the reality, we can learn a great deal from the disciples' delayed recognition. If, as I would contend, we are even more prone to withhold judgment than people in Jesus' day, that effects how we go about *evangelism*.

Now, there is a word we Episcopalians can be uncomfortable with—*evangelism*—and I think our discomfort is of precisely the same nature which causes others to be uncomfortable with the propagation of very different kinds of truth. Our discomfort may well stem from the very same post-modern rejection with absolute truth and the (to my

mind) completely incoherent claim that what might be true for one need not be true for another.

If we truly believe that Christ is risen, we believe something stronger than the claim that "for me Christ is risen, but perhaps not to somebody who rejects my meta-narrative". We believe Christ is risen. We're making a claim which believe to be as true as "gravity exists" or "the earth orbits round the sun". We're not just using code language to point to some personal feeling. We're making a claim about the truth of a fact, a fact which is not cotenable with every other religious claim everyone else in the world may make. So important is this truth, so potentially life-changing and world-changing is this truth, that we should find it to be a truth whose universal acceptance would be a positive thing.

Our discomfort with this suggestion cripples our witness. A friend of mine once said that Episcopalian evangelism is like building the most

beautiful, well-appointed boat ever constructed, taking it out into the middle of the ocean, and waiting for the fish to jump in. Needless to say, you'll not catch many fish that way, but sadly I think the analogy rings truer than we'd like to admit.

But, considering the fact that the people we live among are more like those disciples on the road than we might have thought—considering the fact that we now have a couple generations of people who might not have read Heidegger or Derrida or Foucault, but who nonetheless share their rejection of modern logic and argumentation—our approach must be different, and Jesus is once again the model.

We'll not convince many people that Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life" by setting forth propositional arguments. We may, however, help others see the risen Christ when we break bread with them. The good news of the Resurrection is not

limited to what it means for us who have been baptized on the last day. The Resurrection also means that we've already been risen with Christ, and we, the Church, constitute his earthly body. So, when we nurture the kinds of intimate relationships with others that are manifested most powerfully in Christ's breaking of the bread, we open a window of insight into the Christ of whom we are a part. We permit those who do not yet believe to have the opportunity for the same recognition experienced by the disciples.

Our earthly relationships are ideally reflections of the primary relationship God has with us. This is why the marriage rite makes clear that the love shared between husband and wife is a sign of the love "betwixt" Christ and his Church. This is why parents are so intimately involved in the rite of Baptism (and why, for example, I insist on having parents and godparents carry their child through the congregation themselves after a baptism

rather than doing it myself: it's not, contrary to some speculation, because I'm afraid of dropping an infant, but because parents and godparents will ideally serve as more important models of Christian love than some chap in funny dresses).

You see, our domestic community (that is, our household) as well as our ecclesial community (that is, our parish church) are primarily contexts in which we humans in very human ways try to reflect the love of God.

It is appropriate that we remember this today, it being mother's day, since that relationship between mother and child (and between father and child, for that matter) is such an important way in which that love can be made manifest, and sadly, in some cases, can be hidden or ignored. I am often reminded of Saint Monnica, whose feast we celebrated on Wednesday, who recognized that the love she had for her son, Augustine, should be expressed in her desire that he become a catholic

Christian. Parents and children, husbands and wives, should never neglect the mission field which is their own household.

In all events, we learn from this morning's Gospel that the most compelling evidence for Jesus' resurrection is not to be found in any scientific enquiry, but rather in the love we show and are shown. May we be brought to daily conversion, to slowly turning ourselves back toward God when we experience the love His people show toward us, and may we break bread with others in the hopes that they, too, will catch a glimpse of the risen Christ.

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Amen.