

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter– Luke 24:13-35**  
**St Andrew's Episcopal Church - Sedona, AZ**

***Shifting the Narrative***

*And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"*

What events have you been discussing lately? What stories have you been sharing? Have you received news that's so disappointing or heartbreaking that it's been difficult to accept and understand? Or has your heart been warmed by news so joyful that you are bursting to tell anyone and everyone? Have your conversations been uplifting and life affirming? Or have your spirits been dampened by discouraging circumstances? Most of the time we can be thankful that our days are filled with a steady stream of minor irritations and simple joys. But every now and then life throws us a curve ball and our burdens can feel so heavy that it seems like a huge effort to even lift our fingers to count our blessings.

The couple walking on the road to Emmaus has just been hit by one of those metaphorical curve balls. It seems like these followers of Jesus now have no one to follow. And so, they head back home wondering what life will look like now that their leader and teacher and redeemer is gone. Then, out of the blue, a stranger shows up to walk with them on their journey and gradually helps them shift their narrative from one of heartbreak and despair to hopefulness and renewed conviction. Isn't it just like Jesus to show up in

surprising and unexpected ways when you're lost in a fog of disillusionment? Isn't it just like Jesus to come up alongside you and listen deeply to your thoughts and concerns? Isn't it just like Jesus to show up as a stranger and companion along life's journey?

When's the last time you shared with a friend or stranger about Jesus guiding you through your journey of faith? For some of us here today, that happened just a few days ago. If you've ever been to our Thursday Gospel Co-op Eucharist, you know that we read the Gospel lesson for the coming Sunday, and reflect on how it speaks to us in our lives today and sheds light our relationship with God. We offer prayers and then share Communion. Last Thursday, we had a guest come worship with us, and she had the courage to speak from her heart about how God is living and moving in her life as she travels across the country. This person was as much a stranger to us as we were to her. And yet, we trusted in the Holy Spirit to guide our conversation and our worship together. We shared stories about when our hearts had been on fire with God's love; we shared about times when we have been blessed by God's grace; we shared how faithful friends have encouraged us on our journey; we shared about relinquishing worries and fears, and trusting in God. We shared moments of resurrection and new life – alongside a stranger and fellow sojourner.

Since Easter Sunday, the Gospel narratives have been reminding us about Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to his first disciples, not just to re-tell part of salvation history. We are sharing the stories of our faith because those stories, and those events, are the Good News of our lives today. The Good News is that post-resurrection appearances of Jesus keep happening, and we are invited to name those experiences, and describe them, and articulate how our lives have been transformed by them – not only with our family and friends, but with neighbors, and acquaintances, and store clerks and waitresses, and outright strangers. The stories of our faith create the narrative that we live into, and the life we create in partnership with Jesus is our shared journey of faith.

As Episcopalians, we often feel more comfortable expressing our faith through beautiful liturgy in worship services than by sharing stories about what God has done for us after a curve ball has hit us right in the gut. After all, we are the Christian denomination that over several generations has become known as “the frozen chosen.” We earned that unflattering nickname because we got in the habit of politely resisting sharing about our faith journey – pretending as if growing in faith just happens with little effort on our part, except through showing up at church on Sunday mornings. But the times are changing. And The Episcopal Church is changing the narrative. We are shifting how we talk about who we are and whose we are. We are altering how we are

in our neighborhoods, in our communities, in the world. We are transforming how we show up for each other because we are an Easter people. We are people of the Resurrection. People of the Body of Christ. People of a Baptismal Covenant. We are the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement. We are disciples. We are apostles. And we are evangelists! We are walking, and talking, and listening. We are sharing and caring, and we are welcoming the stranger into the conversation. The conversation that at some point in our lives we, too, have been outcasts. We, too, have been marginalized. We, too, have been betrayed. We, too, have been hurt. And like Jesus and because of Jesus, we have been raised up to new life. Through the grace of a kind word; through the mercy of a compassionate gesture; through the peace of a listening ear; through the presence of a loving heart.

Even though I am a life-long Episcopalian, I can't pretend my way through painful phases of life. I can't pretend that these past two weeks have been a bit of a struggle for me. And I can't pretend that Jesus is not walking with me and patiently guiding me toward a renewed sense of life. During Holy Week, I received news that a good friend had died. He was almost 99 years old and lived a full and blessed life. Then last Monday was the seventh anniversary of my father's death. Like many of you, I know what it's like to wade through the murky waters of personal grief and feel caught off guard by waves of sadness. I know what it's like to have one person's death resurrect

thoughts of previous deaths. I know that strange yet familiar feeling that gives me pause and prompts me to be still in the sacred space of my heart's memory; to honor my relationship with loved ones gone before me, and to give thanks for my relationship with God alongside my faith community.

When you are walking on the road to Emmaus, through the valley of the shadow of sadness and disillusionment, the weight of your burden may be heavy, and the length of your journey may feel longer than expected; but Jesus is right there alongside you, listening to your concerns, feeling your pain, and healing your wounded-ness by the grace his inexhaustible unconditional love. Jesus may look like your partner or spouse; your caregiver or nurse. Jesus may appear as your daughter or son; your grocery clerk or hairdresser. Jesus may reach out to you through a teacher or a neighbor; through a friend or a mere stranger.

Even when we aren't paying attention, Jesus is there patiently waiting to find a way into our hearts and transform our brokenness and despair toward healing and wholeness. Whether your spouse was just laid off from work; or a good friend died unexpectedly; or maybe your doctor wants to run more tests and try out a different treatment plan – the promise of God's redeeming love always shifts the narrative toward resurrection and new life. Resurrection for us usually doesn't happen after three days as it did for Jesus. It usually takes longer because our time is not God's time and our ways are not God's ways.

Resurrection is a process. Resurrection is a way of life. Resurrection is the Way of Faith. May we be alert to those fleeting moments when Jesus warms our hearts with his grace that the narrative of our broken and resurrected lives prompts us to rejoice in proclaiming:

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again!

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