

On that same day, that first day of the week Cleopas and his companion made the seven-mile journey to the village of Emmaus. Their pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover came to a devastating end, with their hopes for the dawn of the messianic age nailed to a cross and sealed in a cold stone tomb. Jesus did not overthrow the empire. The taste of death, not victory permeated their senses. Although the women in their midst had said something about Jesus being alive, Cleopas and his companion were weighted down by the reality of what they knew; Jesus had been crucified. That seven-mile trek, with dust rising at every step, was punctuated by their deep sorrows and questions as they conversed, with silence taking root when the weight of it all was too heavy.

When has the distance between point A and point B in your life been punctuated by deep sorrows, questions, and silence? When have sorrows made your feet feel like bricks and your heart like stone? When have questions swirled within you that had no answers? When has the silence all around you and maybe even within you been deafening? Was it the death of a parent or spouse or child? Was it a job loss or a betrayal by a friend? Was it a shattered dream or a diagnosis? Was it unimagined violence that changed

your understanding of the world, like Columbine, or 9/11, the Pulse Night Club, or San Bernardino? When was the road before you long, like the weighted seven-mile journey between Jerusalem and Emmaus? [Pause]

Cleopas and his companion did the only thing that made sense to them in the midst of their confusion and decimated hope of these last days. They headed for home. They headed for what they knew. They headed for their routine, which would protect them from their inconsolable sorrows and overwhelming questions. Maybe they wanted the noise of normal to drown out the excruciating pain of silence. Maybe simple busyness would set the world straight again. They just wanted things to be what they once were, when they understood the world around them.

Into the midst of their confused and anguished wanting to return to what was, Jesus came near. Jesus came near for the faith we claim is incarnational. God shows up in the midst of our sorrows. God shows up in the midst of our questions and accompanies us. God shows up and engages us, for the faith we claim is relational; it is like a dance with the divine, a dance with others. [Pause]

I remember the day when a friend lost her 16-year-old daughter to a drunk driver. She wasn't

worried that day about her daughter, for her daughter was just heading to the park with some friends and the day was still young with bright blue skies. But, then tragedy struck, as her daughter stopped on the median of a busy street, rather than finish crossing the street like her girlfriends on the red. As she stood on the median waiting, a drunk driver slammed into her from behind and then sped off.

What I remember about that horrible day and the days and weeks to come is that people just showed up. Into the midst of that family's unimaginable pain and sorrow, people came near. Words were not necessary, but showing up was and people from all walks of their life came near. People from near and far continued to come near as the days turned to weeks. We continue to come near through remembering and giving thanks for Maddie, most recently gathering on her birthday ten years after her death. People came near for the faith we claim is incarnational; it is relational. Showing up, coming near, being present is the simple yet profound gift our God offered us through Jesus Christ and we then are to offer one another in the midst of life's sorrows, questions and deafening silence.

Jesus came near and engaged the heavy-hearted disciples as they walked, simply asking, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"

Cleopas and his companion figured this stranger would know what was on their hearts and minds, as everyone was talking about the trauma of Jesus' death. The Jews, the Romans, literally everybody knew of Friday's events, as the city had turned from celebrative joy to an angry mob in a matter of days. And so, these two poured out the story of Jesus of Nazareth, as they had experienced it, still unsure of the women's testimony about angels and an empty tomb and that Jesus had risen.

Pouring out our stories requires someone to come near to listen. Have you come near to someone recently and listened? I was with friends recently and they asked about my health. I was amazed at how easily my story poured out, as I recounted the details of my journey from October 28th of last year to now. Friends came near, asked of my story, and then they listened. Coming near, asking and listening is sacred work. How often do you do this for others? How do others do this for you?

Cleopas and his companion were disciples who had walked with Jesus. They were part of the larger circle,

beyond the twelve. They probably experienced the feeding of five thousand and the raising of Lazarus. They might have been with Jesus when he brought sight to the blind and healing to the sick. They certainly were in Jerusalem as Jesus made his final entry when branches were waved and coats were laid down. They knew the trajectory of their faith story; a Messiah was to come to inaugurate a new kingdom, which they understood to mean a revival of their past glory, like the reign of King David. And so, without hesitation they recounted all they knew and Jesus listened attentively until silence indicated completion.

Into the silence of their finished story Jesus spoke. I'm not sure Cleopas and his companion fully grasped Jesus' rebuke given their state of heart and mind, for Jesus said, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe." [Pause] "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe."

I wonder if we would receive the same rebuke this third Sunday of Easter? We can most likely recount the details of Jesus' final week without hesitation, from the waving of palms to Jesus' weeping over the city, from the cleansing of the temple to the gathering for Passover and the breaking of bread, from the Garden of Gethsemane to the foot of the cross. Yet,

are we slow of heart to believe in the empty tomb and the risen Christ? Are we simply foolish, celebrating the resurrection year after year, while never claiming its power for our lives or for the life of this church? Are we more like Cleopas and his companion than we care to admit, more comfortable with returning to what was, to what we know? Are we more comfortable with reconstructing the past, rather than paying attention to the future God has in store for us?

Cleopas and his companion just wanted things to be what they once were, when they understood the world around them. I think all of us might feel a bit like Cleopas and his companion at times given the chaos of the world around us, for what once was doesn't seem to work anymore. The tendency to hunker down and return to what is familiar is tempting. Reminiscing about days gone by when churches like ours were filled to capacity is enticing. Wanting to create what was, oft seems more desirable than trying to figure out what will work today. Yes, at times our past glory seems more comforting, then the chaos of now.

Yet, I am here to tell you that since my arrival 105 days ago (yes, I have completed my first 100 days), I have not sensed among you a desire to recreate what was. Rather, I have sensed a readiness to leap towards

a new future, trusting that God will give us the wings we need to soar.

This past Friday and Saturday a good number of people came together to clear the way for the renovation of our classrooms. Years of accumulated stuff was sorted through to determine what needed to be preserved, donated or discarded. I thank everyone who participated, for a tremendous amount of work was accomplished in a short amount of time! You might have noticed the filled dumpster, which proves that many hands make the work light! There is still work to be done, yet what an awesome beginning! We can now better imagine the new thing God is going to do with this space this summer, when we welcome up to 60 students and their teachers for a music academy! God is at work among us doing a new thing, and as we free ourselves to imagine new life from what once appeared dead, I have no doubt that we will be as energized as Cleopas and his companion who raced back to Jerusalem to proclaim that they had seen the risen Christ.

You see, something must have broken loose and stirred within Cleopas and his companion as Jesus interpreted the scriptures beginning with Moses and all of the prophets, for when they neared the village of Emmaus they offered him hospitality. Remember, that

scripture tells us that Cleopas and his companion did not yet know this stranger to be the risen Christ. Something shifted within them and their offer of hospitality was received. The dust was washed from their feet and the table was set. Then their guest, this traveling companion who interpreted the scriptures did the unexpected, for he acted as host.

(Pick up the bread) Jesus takes the bread, blesses it and breaks it, and gives it to them. It is in this taking, this blessing, this breaking and this giving that recognition occurs... from overwhelming sorrows to meaningful communion, from the instinctive isolation of normalcy to deep desire to be in community. Their eyes were opened and they were motivated to get up and go. The seven-mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus immediately evaporates for these two disciples, for they hurry back to Jerusalem to confess, "We have seen the risen Christ, made known to us in the breaking of the bread."

Jesus took the bread, blessed the bread and broke it and then gave the bread to Cleopas and his companion. Biblical commentator Molly Marshall writes, "Hospitality is the key to evangelism in our day. Actions more than words, welcome more than self-protection [or preservation] provides the space where others

might find themselves." Hospitality is the key... as a church we must show up, come near, and be present to our wider community. When the Music Academy is on campus we must show up and be present. How might we ask a few questions and elicit stories from those we will encounter when we do?

Has something broken loose and stirred within us, as we have heard God's word proclaimed? Do we claim with certainty that resurrection is a daily possibility of bringing life from what appears to be dead within us and around us? Are our hearts burning within us? Are we on fire for what God is doing in us, among us and around us?

Friends, the faith we claim is incarnational and relational, and we must be the ones doing the showing up, coming near and being present for others, especially for those beyond our faith community. Like Cleopas and his companion, we must be willing to get up and go, even though we may have already trekked a great distance.

I once remember a congregant being really mad with me at the conclusion of a worship service. He came to me and said, "What do you mean... I can't just retire and stop serving others? You mean I have to figure out how God can use me now, even if I can't do what I used to be able to do?" I didn't have to say much. I just

listened as he processed the message that he had heard. The fire of Kenny's faith was fueled that day and something broke loose and he became ready and willing to show up, come near and be present in a new way for others.

On the road to Emmaus and through the hospitality of the table, Jesus stoked the fires of faith for Cleopas and his companion. Revitalized they sprang into action, willing and ready to show up and be present to others in a new way. Kenny, Cleopas and his companion were ready... What about us? Even though the road may be long, are we on fire for what God is doing in us, among us and around us so that we will show up and be present to others, especially those beyond the walls of this church? I pray, so. Amen.