

## Easter 3 Sermon

April 26, 2020

Welcome, everyone on this Third Sunday after Easter. In the Church we do things a bit differently than the secular world. For example, we celebrate Christmas for twelve days, not just one. And, Easter gets an entire season which we call The Great Fifty Days of Easter. Easter Sunday is only the beginning of one great long joyful party by Christians all over the world that is devoted to the celebration of our Jesus' resurrection.

Walk into any store on the Monday after Easter and you will see the Easter display of candy and plastic eggs with a huge 50% OFF sign. Walk into the same store just two weeks later and whatever is left of the Easter goodies will now sadly be clumped together at the back of the store with a large 90 % OFF sign. Only two weeks have passed since Easter Sunday and, in the retail world, Easter is considered completely over, done, finished! Now wait a minute! If that Godiva was good two weeks ago, it is still good today. I know the shelf life of chocolate lasts longer than a few weeks!

Why did the church decide to celebrate Easter for fifty days? The answer is easy. After the resurrection, Jesus spent forty days on earth before He ascended back to heaven and then there were another ten days before the Day of Pentecost. "*Penta*" being Greek for five and "*pentekoste*" meaning fiftieth.

Today's gospel is one of my absolute favorites because it is a story that has spoken to me throughout my life. It is a story about disappointment and about crushed hopes and expectations. I invite you to pick a disappointment that has happened to you sometime in your life. It could be any disappointment to ponder. It could be the school you thought was perfect for you and you for them that turned you down. It could be about the person you were absolutely certain was the one you were meant to spend your life with who walked away and left you with barely a nod. It could be about the job you thought would be satisfying and meaningful that instead turned out to be a nightmare. The list goes on and on.

As we hear the story of the disciples in today's gospel from Luke, their disappointment comes through so clearly. As they walk along the road to a nearby town trying to come to terms

with their crushed hopes, Jesus draws close to them and asks, “What are you talking about as you walk along this road?” Luke paints the picture for us, “Their faces were downcast as they said, ‘Are you the only one living in Jerusalem who doesn’t know the things that have happened in the past three days?!’ Are you the only one who hasn’t heard what a miserable mess everything turned out to be?! “We had hoped,” they said, that Jesus was the one who was going to redeem Israel. “We had hoped...” Those three words speak volumes about their disappointment. “We had hoped...”

Now you fill in the blank from your own life. “We had hoped that the test results would be different. The doctors said I was doing so well.” “We had hoped that the job offer would come through...” We had hoped that they would reconcile...” We had hoped! The list goes on and on.

The disciples’ story could be just another in a long line of life’s tragic events. Sooner or later, and probably sooner, everyone of us finds ourselves on the Road to Emmaus, the road that is filled with hurts and disappointments. Just as the two disciples could not recognize Jesus when He quietly appeared beside them, there are times when we cannot recognize much of anything because we are so deeply discouraged and overwhelmed by pain. This is the Emmaus road.

Fortunately, the story doesn’t end here because Jesus shows up when He is least expected, so unexpected that the disciples cannot recognize Him until they sit down together that evening for dinner. It is only when He takes the bread and breaks it that their eyes are opened and they recognize Him. And, then He disappears just as quickly as He had arrived, but that is all they need to be convinced that Jesus really is alive. The seven mile walk to Emmaus from Jerusalem that had taken them the better part of the afternoon, became a quarter marathon as they turned and sprinted back to tell the other disciples that they had seen the risen Lord. “It is true!” they said when they arrived out of breath to find the eleven others. The Lord has risen!”

Now, here is the take-away from this wonderful story. Jesus keeps showing up when we least expect Him, in ways that we can never imagine. Jesus shows up in the garden to Mary and she thinks he is the gardener. Jesus shows up in the midst of our own suffering and disappointments. Jesus shows up to walk beside us and to listen to us as we share our hurts. And

then, if we let Him, He will sit down and break bread with us. The Broken Bread in the eucharist heals our broken spirits.

In the last days of my father's life before he finally passed away, he lingered for a long time. He had courageously fought cancer for over a decade by allowing himself to be used in clinical trials in several research programs. Through his participation in medical science and his faith in God, he had lived far longer than he was ever expected to live. When the cancer finally metastasized in his brain then even the best oncological team was not able to stop its rapid spread throughout his body. For days he was no longer with us, but he had not yet passed away. C.S. Lewis speaks of that time in a person's life as "between worlds." And, that is very much what it was like to watch him as he lingered. One night as my husband and I sat by his bed in the University of VA Hospital wondering how things would finally end, two young residents in oncology entered the room on late night rounds. After a moment of chatting, one of them said, "We understand that both of you are ordained clergy."

"Yes," we said, "that's true."

"Why don't you celebrate the eucharist now?"

"Well, why not?" we thought.

One of the two residents left and came back with a dinner roll and the other produced a tiny can of grape juice and there in the hospital room amid all the tubes and indecencies of a room devoted to dying, my husband held the bread and spoke those familiar words, "On the night that He was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to his disciples and said, 'Take, eat: this is my body which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.'"

There in a hospital room in Charlottesville in the stillness of the night all of us felt the presence of the Risen Lord in our midst. As soon as the brief service concluded, my husband and I thanked the young residents and left. Before we were barely out of the parking lot, the Head Nurse called to tell us that my father had just passed away peacefully.

Broken bread, broken spirits; broken lives, Christ died so that even though we die we will have life everlasting. In the words taken from our Book of Common Prayer:

“The liturgy for the dead is an Easter liturgy. It finds all its meaning in the resurrection. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we too shall be raised.”

Dear friends, WE are Easter people! and every day is an Easter celebration. May you meet the Risen Lord on your travels now and always.

Amen.