

Easter 3A—April 23, 2023  
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All Saints' Episcopal Church

Acts 2: 14a, 36-41

Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19

1 Peter 1:17-23

Luke 24:13-35

Well, spring is springing! The signs are everywhere—the lengthening days, the daffodils and crocus. There was a bear in our yard the other day lumbering along after a long winter's nap. And there is another sign of spring....especially after walking the dog---ticks! The other day I pulled one off that had snuck by my inspection. Ugh! Recently we bought Aspen, our dog, her annual flea and tick collar, and this morning I was putting on my collar---sometimes referred to as a 'dog collar'—and I looked down at Aspen and said 'trade ya'? Well, hang on to that thought—I'll return to it!

This morning I particularly want to focus on the gospel lesson of the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. This is probably one of my most favorite passages to preach on. We have to remember that in this story, like many of the stories, the gospel writer uses a story to relay an important point of faith and understanding of who Jesus is. Don't get caught up in the 'magic' of the story, and say, 'well, that could never happen'. Listen more intently to the point and the spiritual lesson he is trying to convey. Let's paint the scene....

Two disciples are wondering down the road to Emmaus—about 7 miles from Jerusalem-- on the evening of the resurrection. They are talking about the events of the last 3 days and someone comes along side of them and begins to ask them what they are talking about. Somehow, as the gospel says, they are kept for seeing who Jesus was—reminiscent of how Mary had a hard time seeing Jesus for who he was in the morning encounter. Again, there was something different about his 'resurrected' form maybe that was just different. And, well, like the angels said to Mary, why do you look for the living among the dead....maybe they weren't 'looking' for him or expecting him in any form! They began to explain to him what had been happening and he was taking it all in as if he didn't know. They told of his arrest and crucifixion. They said "But we hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." They were still thinking of him as the hoped for messiah—as the type that would liberate them from Rome, a military and political leader. Someone who would 'make Israel great again'! Ha!

[Lisa Beausoleil said to me once: it occurred to her that Jesus came not to redeem just Israel, but he came to redeem Rome!]

Then, finally, he started to respond to them. He called them foolish and began to open the scripture to them starting with Moses and the prophets to explain and show how the messiah was actually supposed to suffer to redeem Israel. There were these voices all the way through their scriptures as in the passages in Isaiah about the ‘suffering servant’. It is important to remember that when this gospel was written, the early church was still struggling with how to understand who Jesus was and how they were going to carry on without him.

At a certain point, Cleopas and his friend started to turn off the road to Emmaus for the night and Jesus made as if he was going to walk on, but they insisted that he stay the night with them. The King James version of the Bible has it: Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent”—which was the inspiration for the well-known hymn “Abide with me” (‘fast falls the even tide’—first line). This hymn is so well known to the several generations that went through WWI and WWII—it was a great comfort in the time of great grief.

Verse 5 especially:

*Hold now your cross before my closing eyes.*

*Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.*

*Heaven's morning breaks and earth's vain shadows flee;*

*in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.*

Then at supper he ‘blessed the bread, broke the bread, and gave it to them’. This language was already associated with Eucharistic liturgy and celebration, so it would not have been lost on the early readers. Luke was making a statement about Christ’s presence with us in Eucharist. He did so even more powerfully in saying that immediately after this Jesus disappeared.

Then the disciples’ eyes were opened. They suddenly knew it was Jesus. This is where I really want to be a movie director and somehow convey the mystery of this. I see Jesus holding up the bread, probably pita bread, tearing it in two, and suddenly he disappears and the bread hangs in the air for a moment and the disciples see it and see each other through it or passed it. Aha!, the revelation---under this sign, in the sharing of bread/Eucharist, and with each other we see Christ and we become Christ in the world. Do you know that at the fraction of the host at the end of the Eucharistic prayer this is exactly what I am envisioning—looking through ‘our host’ to you!

In the Anglican tradition we have always tried to avoid defining how Christ is in the Eucharist, and the phrase we have more commonly used is ‘the Real Presence’, which means that we believe that how Christ is present is a bit of a mystery, but that he is present and not just in the bread, but in the whole act of the celebration and in the gathered community—he is really present with us.

## Part 2

Now, a hard right turn....I want to talk with you again about the importance of prayer in our daily live, and use one particular prayer to get at the joys of prayer. Turn with me in the BCP to page 99 and the prayer for renewal in Morning Prayer found there.

See if I get it right (recite without looking)...

*O God the king eternal, who’s light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning, drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace, that having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Did I get it right? Now, I need to tell you that I didn’t set out to memorize that prayer. It just happened with frequent repetition—and I pray this prayer most mornings when I say Morning Prayer. Now, whether you recite written prayers or make them up extemporaneously, both have their value. The great tradition of the BCP is that these are wonderfully written prayers that have stood the test of time and are beautifully written. As most scholars of the English language will tell you, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, first written in 1549, is one of the great books of English literature. [ as one parishioner said after the service: an old quote about the BCP is that ‘these prayers are not good because they’re old, they’re old because they’re good’].

Now let’s unpack this prayer....

**O God the king eternal:** this sets the stage with a declaration of the sovereignty of God—written before inclusive language, but maybe “O God, the sovereign creator of all that is”

**Who’s light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning:** a separate but related phrase about God’s role in creation and his essence in ‘light’. Our God is the bringer of light to us and to our world. Have you ever been camping and the romantic notion of sleeping out under the

stars just didn't ring true when your sleeping bag and inflatable mattress just didn't do the job and you tossed and turned all night desperately hoping for the morning. Well, you know the glory in some way of 'turning the shadow of death into the morning'!

**Drive far from us all wrong desires:** that just puts it out there—first thing in the morning. Help us, O God, or, as it were, 'lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil'. May God help us keep our spiritual wits about us!

**And incline our hearts to keep your law:** now when I think of 'keeping the law' I remember what Jesus told them when he was asked what the greatest commandment was and he responded: 'to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength; and the second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself. I also think of what he said to his disciples at the Last Supper when he washed their feet—his 'new commandment'—that they love one another as he loved them.

**And guide our feet into the way of peace:** remind me through the day that wherever I walk and whatever I do or say, that my way may be united with Your way in spreading peace. And peace in the Hebrew sense of the word, shalom—an all-encompassing sense of wellness and right relationship with God and others.

**That having done your will with cheerfulness during the day:** ah, and here is the challenge I frequently do not succeed at. How hard it is to stay cheerful in the midst of the day....and doing God's will. I am too frequently a grumbler! But, oh!, the joy of being cheerful in the midst of the day and sharing that with others. It can be contagious!

**We may when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks!:** And here is another test of living spiritually through the day. Are you rejoicing at the end of the day and giving thanks? How on earth do we achieve that? Again, too often I am not rejoicing, but just thankful the day is over, and something is not right about that. And yet we have had those days—maybe more by accident than intent. This little prayer challenges us to live with intent, so that at the end of the day we are rejoicing in the goodness of God.

Now, again, I hope you use both great old prayers and extemporaneous prayer, and contemplative prayer, and that you practice prayer with intention on a daily basis. When we are steeped in prayer and 'pray without ceasing', as St. Paul says, it shapes us, opens us to the power of God in your life. Prayer, in this way, is rather like having a tick collar on. Aha!, I bet you didn't think I could weave that back into the sermon!

Our prayer tick collar helps to protect us through all the hours of the day from those pesky little spiritual creatures that creep quietly into our mind—sometimes we can't even feel them crawling in—they latch on and begin to suck the life right out of us! And worse yet, like ticks today, may infect us with some very debilitation disease (Lyme, Rocky Mtn fever). Intentional prayer is the daily practice that protects you from all that would spiritually suck you dry or infect you.

So, pray brothers and sisters, and just like those disciples on the road to Emmaus, being steeped in prayer, our eyes will be opened to the glory of Christ in our midst—in the breaking of bread and in each other's lives—and, at the end of the day, 'rejoice to give God thanks'!