

Easter Sunrise: 'The Road To Emmaus'

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It was not so long ago when I would ride my bicycle through the Back Bay, turn left onto PCH and pedal to this beach, this Crown of the Sea. And sitting upon its sands, the sun warming me from head to foot, think about what it was I was meant to do, who I was meant to be, in this world. Often my thoughts were as cloudy as many a beach morning...filled with wonderings about what was wrong around me, what was wrong inside me. Yet, something wouldn't let me be, wouldn't let me remain in that fog filled mind. When I left, I always left believing in possibilities for our world and for myself. I'd get back onto my bicycle and literally coast down MacArthur Blvd so very free and so very grateful to be alive.

Cleopas and his companion, like I often did those days and still sometimes do, had a lot on their minds as they journeyed towards Emmaus. Emmaus is identified only as being a town 7 miles from Jerusalem. There is no other claim to fame and scholars guess at its true location. But the road to Emmaus is as famous a Biblical reference as is the Garden of Eden. For it is on this road that the risen Jesus appears.

Cleopas and his companion are talking feverishly when Jesus comes near and asks, what is it you are talking about? Surprised by his unknowing, they recount to the stranger Jesus' trial and his death on the cross. They talk about the subsequent rumors. Women came and announced, "Jesus is alive." They explain that they went to look into the grave and, when they did, there was no body. They sound troubled. "We had hoped he would redeem Israel." They sound confused. "We went to the tomb but did not see him." They do not understand what has happened. Their way forward is unclear.

I think, however, they are pretty sure something is going on. They are trying to figure out how it all fits together. It is an impossible feat without a reference that points to something bigger than the world they see about them. There is something at work other than the empire.

Yet how slow they are to believe it is so. How slow we are to believe. Part of us always wonders, when something so horrible has happened, why God allows it. Or, as someone in Bible Study asked, "has God done anything in our world in the last 2000 years since Jesus? (I love it that in Bible Study we encourage such questions). The translation of "Has God done anything lately?" and "Why does God allow these things to happen" is simply,

"does God care?" Does God care about the world? If we are completely honest this question often translates to "does God care about me?"

We're ashamed, in one sense, to ask because we know that there is a right answer. "Yes, of course, God loves you." But the reality is that there are times that it doesn't feel like it. It was hard to believe when the boy I once loved, loved another. It was hard to hear about God's love when I just couldn't make the grade. It is hard to believe in God's care for you when your job isn't going your way or when you lose a dear friend or when your family seems to turn on you or when your health makes the future even more uncertain.

And, yet, those are also times when we most need to be connected to a higher power, to one who doesn't give a damn about your grade or your next sale or your next romance but cares deeply about you.

Oh, but if God really cared then.... It is hard to give those things up, isn't it?

When our future swerves onto an ungraded road and we're bumping along barely able to hold the steering wheel, it is essential to life to know there is one we can trust to steer for us.

Cleopas and his companion are trying to steer themselves away from a torn up faith when Jesus walks up to them. The first thing Jesus does, after they've explained their situation, is to connect them with the larger narrative of God. Starting with Moses and the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them all the things about himself in the scripture. This news that Jesus is alive was not something new or fickle. It was not a product of the women's imaginations. It wasn't just their own thoughts. It fit into a larger narrative of faith. When they could see that... when the clouds were burned off by truth...their questions became a statement of God's faithfulness..."Yes we too saw Jesus," they say to the disciples, "he made himself known in the breaking of the bread." just as he said.

It is intriguing that on the road to Emmaus there isn't just one person, there are two, Cleopas and his unnamed companion, meaning you and me are invited on this journey. Each one of us is invited. In fact, I dare say, the risen Jesus, here, reveals part of the mission of the church. Church connects our stories with God's story... our lives with God's steadfast love...our hopes with God's

faithfulness.

It took Cleopas and it takes us time to understand. Jesus walks seven miles with them. Seven is the number of days it takes for God to create the world. Whenever we are shaken into having to find a new way, it takes time to see.

Well, Jesus left us many teachings. Jesus' teachings allow us to connect our story to God's story. Take what I think may be the best known teaching outside of Christmas and Easter...the teaching of the Prodigal Son [Luke 15:11]. Notice how there is a place for each of us. We are or have been the prodigal, the one who is sure we know what is best for us, running off with what we can take and finding ourselves empty. We are the eldest son, patiently, faithfully doing our part when someone undeserving enters in and takes the glory. We are the Father so happy when the one we lost has returned. All are part of God's story.

Connect to God's story. That's what the church helps people do each and every day. That's what worship, Bible Study, prayer, pastors, mentors, and the members of the congregation do.

But, please be patient. It takes awhile for Jesus' words to really form you, to help you make sense of your faith journey, to align your journey with God's will for you.

Over time, you'll hear about the older brother and you'll recognize God doesn't want you to stand at a distance from his love...go and love the one who loves your brother, enjoy the party. Over time you'll hear stop thinking all you deserve is the food of swine. Get up. Return. Your father has so much more for you. Over time you'll feel that love for a child of God, with love like God's, and will be overwhelmed and spurred on to do something you've never dreamed.

You want to know God cares about you...that God is doing something in the world today? Connect to God's story.

Our God story has not yet come to an end. Cleopas and his companion arrive in Emmaus. Jesus, who is still a stranger, looks as if he will continue on, beyond Emmaus. But one of the two has the courage to say: "please stay. Please come and eat with us." Jesus in life and in resurrected life is always glad to be invited to dinner.

Once again we join Jesus at the table. The table isn't the last Supper, it isn't set just for the twelve disciples, it is for us all, for you and me, for all who come after, for all who are formed by Jesus' teachings and want more. Jesus, please remain with us.

It is the table which sits on that transcendent line...that line between what we can see and what we cannot...

that which is logical to believe and that which breaks through all logic... the crucifixion and the resurrection. The risen Jesus is no ghost, no puppet, no figment of the imagination. When he joins Cleopas, he is very much alive on this earth. But he doesn't stay for long, does he? As soon as they recognize him he is off. The point isn't for him to hang about and live a second life. Rather Jesus reveals himself as having risen from the dead so that we might look again to God above, our Father, the one who has power over life and death, the one who is faithful, the one we can trust.

It is in the breaking of the bread that the risen Christ makes himself known. Their eyes were opened. They connected ... they trusted...forevermore they are part of God's story. So may you too believe and walk this coast line this morning more free and alive in Christ.