

Grace, mercy, and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (Christ is risen indeed!) We're kind of used to the idea now that Christ is risen. Liturgically speaking, we've had a couple of weeks to let it sink in, since our commemorations of Holy Week and Easter Sunday. In more literal terms, it's been couple millennia for us and our ancestors in the faith, all combined. But for these two disciples on the road to Emmaus at the end of Luke's Gospel it's still the same day. A lot has happened, but until Jesus shows up on the road with them in the midst of their journey, they are at a loss. Try as they might, and they are trying when Jesus interrupts them they just can't process what has happened to them and their friends. That's what they thought of the women's news of angels announcing Jesus' resurrection. They did not believe it. And so they're going home. They've had enough.

I'm a big fan of the Revised Common Lectionary that determines our weekly readings on a three-year cycle, but one of my minor gripes is that while we get the Thomas story *every* year this story of the Emmaus disciples we get only once every three years on a Sunday morning. It is the appointed reading for the evening of Easter Sunday every year, but somehow I don't think there would be much enthusiasm for still one more service, including from yours truly. But this reading today is just as important as the Thomas story in connecting the church of our day to Jesus. In the Thomas story, though, Jesus is explicit in making that connection, so maybe that's why we make sure to read it every year. Thomas, like the rest of the disciples, believed in Jesus' resurrection only when he saw Jesus and touched him. Jesus knew that that would not be a possibility for most people throughout history, which was already the case for the community of Christians whom John was writing to. "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe," said Jesus. That's us, by the way, whom Jesus was blessing in the presence of Thomas and the other disciples.

Luke's story has ultimately the same goal as John's Thomas story, but it is a bit more subtle. These two disciples on the road to Emmaus are on a journey. First, it's a seven-mile walk home from Jerusalem with an unrecognized companion. Then it's a seven-mile run back to Jerusalem to share the astonishing news of Jesus's appearance to them. That's at least two hours walking, and maybe an hour running, for a good runner. But in addition to being on a physical journey, they are on a spiritual one as well, a journey from sorrow and regret, through recognition and amazement, to overwhelming joy and lives that will never be the same, all in the course of a single day.

The journey of these two disciples is also the church's journey. I think Luke clearly meant to convey that. This is one of my favorite Bible stories. In the past, though, I have tended to focus in on the ending, how Jesus revealed himself in the breaking of the bread, which is clearly a reference to the church's practice of Holy Communion. One important point that Luke is trying to get across here is that in the church's sharing of the words of Scripture and the Communion meal, disciples who never met Jesus during his earthly mission have the same access to him that the original disciples had, in all the ways that matter. But the breaking of the bread is not the only thing that is happening here, or even the main thing. It is rather the culmination of everything that had been happening since they left Jerusalem.

And what had been happening? First, the disciples were lamenting what had been lost. They had had high hopes for Jesus. They had ideas for how he was going to make Israel a great nation again as the promised Messiah sent from God. But now that dream had been dashed, and

they would give anything to have it back again. If only they could go back and stop Jesus from dying... The disciples are living in the past because they have no hope for the future they imagined, and no vision for an alternative.

Second, something had been happening as they walked along talking to this stranger they didn't yet know was Jesus. Something was happening as he led them through the Scriptures during those two hours or so down that road. Something was happening that they didn't notice happening until later. But it was happening. Their hearts were burning as Jesus spoke, they noticed in retrospect, as he showed how all of God's activity throughout history had been focused on saving humankind from sin, death, and evil, and how all of that had been leading up to Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection.

Finally, after Jesus reveals himself in the meal, everything comes together for them, everything is cast in a new light - their past, their future, and their present. I don't imagine they had great clarity on the details. But they knew then that everything had changed. Jesus *was* the Messiah. He was with them all along on their journey, and he would be with them again. They do not wait until morning when it will be safe to travel. They head straight out into the danger of the night and back to their fellow disciples in Jerusalem as fast as they could with the news of their encounter with Jesus, only to find that Jesus had been busy appearing to them as well. What could be next?

Sisters and brothers in Christ, all three of these phases in the disciples' experience on that first Easter Day have been lived out in the church throughout time, and are being lived out among us right now. This is acutely felt in our context, where church attendance and church influence are declining. We too often find ourselves mourning the loss of our past glory, and wishing we could get back to the way it was before.

But as we fret and worry and lament, Jesus comes among us, we who are gathered here in his name. Jesus is among us, right here, right now, in the reading and expounding of Scripture, and in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, reminding us of God's love, God's forgiveness, and God's victory over sin, death, and evil. This is terribly important to remember especially when we are discouraged and disappointed. Just as it was with the Emmaus Disciples, Jesus is with us on our journey, present in our gatherings, a companion on the way, even before we realize it, before we recognize his presence, before we have made sense of the burning in our hearts.

And then, when we are granted such moments of revelation, when we recognize and experience the risen Christ among us, all of our encounters in word and sacraments come together to give us comfort in the present, hope for the future, and a joyful, compelling desire to live out the gospel in our lives and make it real in the lives of others as well.

All of these phases of the disciples experience – lament, fear, surprise, burning conviction, recognition, joy, and expectation – all of these churn together in our lives, moving from one to another and back again. But through all of them, Jesus is with us, when we feel it and when we don't, when we're aware and when we're oblivious. Our task as the church is to remind ourselves of that presence, to persist in proclaiming the promise of the resurrection, and to share the hope that is within us with the world around us. May God strengthen and empower us for that task, little by little, day by day, throughout the journey of our lives, and keep our hearts and minds in the life-changing good news that Christ is risen, alleluia! (Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!)