

Reading Through Resurrection Eyes

Luke 24: 13-35

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” ¹⁹ He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” ²⁵ Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us^f while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

There was a question the rabbis would ask a disciple would show interest in studying with them. The rabbis would ask, “How do you read?” How do you read scripture and the world? Do you read through the lens of Moses, or through the lens of the prophets? Do you read legalistically or metaphorically or by experience? What is the lens through which you understand who God is, who we are, and how we are to understand the current events happening in our world? All really big questions.

As the two disciples walk home down Emmaus Road, they are trying to put the pieces together from the recent events. They are trying to make sense of Jesus’ death and what happened to the body. They are arguing over interpretations of how to read the situation when a third person shows up. We know who it is, but the disciples don’t. Their eyes are kept from recognizing him,

from reading him. In the Greek Jesus shows up literally as a “resident alien.” Someone who lives here but is not from here. The stranger has an accent and a green card. This *campanero* asks them what they are arguing over. And you can hear the gears turning in their heads as they recall the events, trying to fit the fragmented pieces together. How is it God has allowed all of this to happen? How could the one who is to redeem us from the empire be killed by the empire? What’s next for us? All really big questions. All questions we ask after enduring a great loss.

So what does this *campanero* do? He starts doing a bible study like our Lectionary Café! He begins interpreting stories. And not just any story, but stories which point to characters who he identifies with. Stories which help them to understand why the Messiah must suffer. And as he does he is *teaching them how to read!* And as he teaches them to read, he is teaching us to read as well. Now we don’t know which stories he tells—Luke never tells us—so we have to go back and read them for ourselves. And not just any stories, but the ones which help us to make sense of the suffering in the world.

So let’s look at an uncommon story we probably never learned in Sunday school. It is as horrible as something we would watch on HBO and I’m sorry about that. But I imagine it’s one Jesus retold as he and the disciples walked down Emmaus Road. It’s from the seventh chapter of Joshua where Israel is entering into the promised land. After Israel is victorious in conquering part of the land from the Canaanites, they are told by God not to pillage any of their possessions. But they do not listen and they do it anyways. They collect all the silver and gold and pearl necklaces. Except, when it is time for the next battle, they underestimate their opponent and get smeared. So in their disappointment—it literally says with “hearts melting” and “downcast faces”—they try to figure out what went wrong. Sound familiar?

So General Joshua goes before God and begs for an answer to which God replies like any parent, “well, you didn’t listen. You’ve taken their possessions after I told you not to. There are consequences for your actions. If you want to start winning again, you have to rectify the situation.”

So Joshua sets up a lottery system to determine the guilty party—all credited to God by the way. He calls forth the twelve tribes and cast lots to uncover the culprit responsible for their suffering. The black stick falls on the tribe of Judah. So they bring forward all the clans of Judah and cast lots again and it lands on one of the clans. Then they cast lots on the households of the clan and then the families, and so forth until the black stick finally lands on a young man named Achan. Achan then confesses, they search his tent and find some silver coins hidden under his bed. Now that they’ve found the responsible person they put Achan and his family on trial. They convict him and all of them to which then all of Israel participates in a liturgy of stoning and burning them—all ordained by God of course. Israel then earns back God’s approval which means they can continue winning over the Canaanites with the assurance that God is on their side. The end.

It is a horrible Old Testament story that most of us would not want to hear. So why in the world would Jesus point to a story like this one? Because here is the question: *which character in the story is the Jesus character?* Is it General Joshua—who Jesus is named after? Is it the God who sets up a lottery system of violence against a guilty party? Or does Jesus relate to Achan—the

one who is put on trial, convicted, and sentenced as the scapegoat who carries the blame and shame for the community?

You see what Jesus is doing? He is teaching them to read and to understand his situation, to know the true nature of who and what and how God is: not as one who is so insecure that we too become insecure as God's people. But a God who identifies as the Achans and Hagars, the George Floyds and Brionna Taylors, those who are bullied for being different, and all other victims of society's wrath. Jesus is teaching the disciples to read through resurrection eyes. To seeing beyond violence to peace, beyond victimhood to forgiveness. And in doing so he pulls all the fragmented pieces which didn't make any sense earlier together. And what do their hearts do as a result? They burn! Not with God's vengeance, but with God's radical love, compassion, mercy and forgiveness. And when we begin to see things this way, is it not what makes our hearts burn as well?

But here's the thing: it isn't until the disciples come to the table that their eyes are finally opened. It is one thing to understand who Jesus is and it is another to know when he is in our presence. It isn't until we come together that our eyes can be opened to who Jesus is and who we truly are as well.

A final note: it turns out there is no historical road named Emmaus. There is no town named Emmaus seven miles or twenty miles from Jerusalem. It is not a real place. Either this is a mistake on Luke's part...or this is intentional. Why is it intentional? Because Emmaus Road is every road. It's Stafford Road and Hawthorne Road and Bolton Street. You see, all roads lead to the table.

And what do we know about the two disciples—Cleopas and the unnamed one? Not much. But this is also intentional. Why? Because the unnamed disciple...is you. (It is Cleopas and [Fill in your name here].)

We are the ones whose eyes are opened to the truth of God's mercy and compassion at the table. We are the ones who Jesus teaches to read with resurrection eyes—beyond violence to peace; beyond victimhood to forgiveness. And when we begin to see things this way, does it not make our hearts burn?