

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The road to Emmaus.

So, how does this walk by two disciples on the road to Emmaus some 2000 years ago affect you? You and I were not there, for sure. Were we?

This is the first day of the week after his crucifixion. They had been there right along with the others, shouting “Hosannas” on his entry into Jerusalem, with palms in their hands. “This is IT”, they shout. “The Messiah has come, and we will be delivered yet again on this, the Passover!!” “God is on our side, and we will prevail!” Everything that they all hoped for....right in front of them.

Then...it all comes crashing down. The news travels like wildfire....everybody knows, out on the road.....

“What? You don’t even KNOW? Where have you been? Why, only this morning, some women said the tomb was empty...and a sighting of angels, no less...and, just to prove it up, some went to verify and yes...the tomb was empty.”...they cry out to this stranger. In their grief, and crushing loss of all that was meaningful to them, all that was sacred now torn into fragments, they are left to wandering out on the road. Certainly talking about Jesus..his teaching, his healing, what had happened during the week, how he was so reckless at the end. If only he had kept a lower profile. If only he had not done this. If only he had done that instead. If only... If only...if only.... Let me ask you: in your life, have you ever gone from a place of the highest emotion, and then thrust down to the lowest points of despair? The road to Emmaus started out as a road to despair.

Now, here in 2017, picture you and I together, out on the road, returning home from church. Just like anybody else, across all time, two folks with the same concerns as the rest of humanity...keeping body and soul together, keeping out of trouble, keeping in tune with the times, and now keeping a stiff upper lip in the face of dashed hopes and shattered dreams. Just like us...talking about taxes too high, wages too low, kids too wild, and so on. Wandering home from church, having heard a message of hope, and rebirth, and love from God...but we see challenges, and feel our weaknesses...thinking or whispering, “We need to get more people in church.” “Our average age is too old”. “We need young people”. “The cost of maintaining our building is beyond us”. And so on...

Let us imagine that we meet someone who is not aware of the specific issues facing our church.

“What? Where have you been?” Haven’t you heard about the difficulties of the church? How people in the church are now are old, and/or worn out, and/or broke....in a bunch of broken down old buildings that are really only museums of long ago?” Haven’t your heardhow our chief priests handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel”.

“Where have you been? Do not you know? Do not you have eyes to see, and ears that hear?”

No. That stranger on the road to Emmaus did NOT have the eyes to see, or the ears to hear THAT message. The message that the world is all too willing to tell. Tell me. Tell you. Telling everyone else that one cannot, or one should not, or one will not. The great vision and message of the world is...subtraction. Limitation. Suppression. Domination. Criticism. Correction. Nay saying. Death. It is all death, all the time.

No, remember that Jesus asked the question, “Is there life BEFORE death?” So, do you, or I, or anyone else we know and love have the eyes to see and ears to hear THAT? The other message? The one of (quote) opening the scriptures to us (unquote), caused them to wonder in amazement that “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?”

Our hearts burning within us. The Excitement, and Anticipation of the promise of the Messiah’s coming had returned to them, once they recognized him on the breaking of the bread. NOW, they recognize the Resurrection...not just of Jesus, but of themselves. And now it is time for us to see our own Resurrection as well.

My heart is burning within me...all because of what some patching plaster and paint can do, in addition to the great promise of opportunities we can elect to see when the city codes enforcer tells us that we have a fire escape out there that needs work.

We can continue to pine for the good old days, worshiping ghosts of memories past, dwindling down in numbers and energy and vitality until the last person turns out the lights for good because we just continue to waste away...following the message of the world. Who wants you, or needs you?

OR we can have the eyes to see and ears to hear our own possibilities, and be energized by the new life that God wants for this parish...a large, mostly vacant building complex, in the downtown City of Rome.

The message of Jesus on that road to those disciples, coming out of scripture, is how we are loved by God. Encouraged by God. Nurtured by God. Engaged with God....all for life before death.

So, today we are going to allow ourselves to dream with God. I am going to ask for, and we will record, any and all suggestions of how we, the people of Zion, can reach out with our resources into this community of want, of need, of loneliness. How...with God’s help and blessing through cooperation and the help of other service providers, we can raise up the spirit and hope of God’s people in this town.

Enough talk. Time for some dreaming. Let’s get started.

Thank you, all who have given voice to the Spirit’s urging and yearnings for us. Notice how the tone in the room started to change. We prepare to eat together....to break bread together..and the conversation moves in a completely different direction so that we hear statements of strength. Of solidarity. Statements of witness.

From a focus of wants and needs, we move into outward expressions of hope. Now, something is going on. Something positive. Away from defeat. Away from resignations of helplessness or apathy, and heading toward the opposite. Now, as people of action, we want to not drop the ball, do not want to lose the initiative and energy that we have experienced. “Were not our heart burning within us as he was talking to us on the road?” We followers of Christ are an Easter people. People of the resurrection.

We have looked too long for God who is already amongst us. Within us. Give thanks to the loving God who not only makes it happen, but allows us to recognize it, and rejoice within it. Within the life that God promises you and me. Give thanks by commenting on it. Support by calling attention to it. Confirm the acts of redemption, of reconciliation, all in testimony to the life of Christ that surrounds us. Then we will join those first disciples who said “The Lord has risen indeed” as we journey down that road with God, leading us and guiding us as the Father, and as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit.

Amen.