

Made Known in the breaking of the bread
Menno Mennonite Church
Easter March 31, 2024

Purpose: To celebrate the coming of Christ's resurrection.

Message: The good news of the resurrection is extraordinary news that comes to us in ordinary ways.

Scripture: Luke 24:13-35 (I will read), Psalm 118:1-2; 14-24 (Please read/have read)

Synopsis: We don't hear the Emmaus experience as an Easter Story. Yet it is. The disciples are continuing on their way. They had heard time and again of the coming of the resurrection, yet they were proceeding without anticipation for the coming of Christ. They need to encounter the goodness of the ordinary—the sharing of the bread—in order to recognize what was truly in front of them. How do we see the resurrection in the day to day, celebrating the reality of Christ living still.

Luke 24:13-35

¹³ Now that same day
two of them were going to a village called Emmaus,
about seven miles from Jerusalem.

¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other,
Jesus himself came up
and walked along with them;

¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷ He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast.

¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him,
"Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem
and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

¹⁹ "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.
"He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed
before God and all the people.

²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over
to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him;

²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one
who was going to redeem Israel.

And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.

²² In addition, some of our women amazed us.

They went to the tomb early this morning

²³ but didn't find his body.

They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels,
who said he was alive.

²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb
and found it just as the women had said,
but him they did not see."

²⁵ He said to them, "How foolish you are,
and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

²⁶ Did not the Christ have to suffer these things
and then enter his glory?"

²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets,
he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going,
Jesus acted as if he were going farther.

²⁹ But they urged him strongly,

"Stay with us, for it is nearly evening;
the day is almost over."
So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them,
he took bread, gave thanks,
broke it and began to give it to them.

³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him,
and he disappeared from their sight.

³² They asked each other,
"Were not our hearts burning within us
while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem.

There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together

³⁴ and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."

³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way,
and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Let's begin today with a thought experiment. This will be quick and painless—not to worry. I would like to start today by taking a few seconds and asking you to consider the concerns you carry—the preoccupations, distractions, your worries. Take 10 seconds with those. Now please, lay them aside the best you can. I know that is easier said than done; once we start considering our concerns we are not always easily able to release that afterward. But clear your head now and take a similar 10 seconds and consider the points of joy for you in your life today. [Pause] Do you have them. Consider the two lists, the two experiences. What was the easier list to fill out and to get further and further down the list? I don't know about you, but it can be a bit of a thing to consider.

We are fairly quick to come up with the things that concern us, those things that weigh us down and call us to action and contemplation. But joy? That's a bit different. If you are anything like me, that process of articulating joy might have taken longer than I would like to admit. I really had to think back to find pure, unalloyed joy, takes some thinking. Not because my days are lacking joy, but because I am not as good at naming it as I am my responsibilities. Joy is not a place we go to easily or all that well.. More to the point, I am guessing that most likely realities of joy that you brought to mind of being joy filled or full of mirth likely had very little to do with your faith, be it at church or not. Go ahead—admit it. I am guessing it is the truth, after all. For most of us responsible church going types, there really isn't a whole lot of joy involved in the whole process of being Christians, if we come down to it, especially for us Mennonites.

Not because we are devoid of joy in life. Today is a day of celebration rejoicing. Yet we know full well that faith is serious business. Were I to critique Anabaptist faith I think I would begin there. In our efforts to foster a sincere, considered and practical faith we are quick to leave behind the joy of the journey. The stories I grew up with were not necessarily the ones of our forebearers and their ecstatic, joy filled expressions of faith, at least as we would understand joy. What I received was stories of sacrifice and incarnation of faith—the stuff of martyrs mirror. We admire their faith, backed by the joy that they held in faith yes, but more for their solid representation of what it means to be faithful in following God with us. I will readily acknowledge that what you hear most from me is an invocation to sincerity and allegiance to the kingdom of God, doing what we can to be faithful witnesses to the way of Christ. I am as frequent in offering the equally relevant argument: how can we do otherwise but live faithfully

when we know that our salvation has come and that the tomb is empty? When the resurrection is real, so too is the kingdom, how can we not serve willingly, love sacrificially, and follow humbly after our God. Celebration and church do not often easily coincide, and I am always curious why. Must we wait for easter only to say too “we follow our risen Lord because in him we find joy, hope, and promise, no matter the season. We might sing the songs of having joy deep down in our hearts, but not always do all that well at showing it on our faces.

Most of the time we don't think of the road to Emmaus as an Easter story. Were you looking for the racing to the tomb, the wonder of finding it empty and Jesus being revealed in the garden calling the name of those who came to tend him, I am sorry for the disappointment. Yet I firmly find this to be precisely that—an Easter story of a different cast. It is on the day of Easter. It attends the coming of the Lord. And for all its otherness and the disciples failure to perceive the one who strode along with them I think it a more resonate and practical Easter story along the way. I find myself resonating at least as much with these disciples of the afternoon road than I do the ones of the early morning revelation, and not simply because I don't tend to be an early riser. Sometimes, the most human thing we can do with stupendous reality is to just keep moving on with life more ordinary. We might hold things in our hearts, ponder them as we go, but go on we still go as we adjust to our worlds turned upside down. It is why sometimes the most natural immediate response to grief is none at all—at least as first. Sometimes the most natural response we have is to simply put one foot in front of the other and to just keep moving as these disciples are.

For the disciples on the road, theirs was not a resurrected reality. They had heard the good news but did not yet understand it to be real. Their hopes of Jesus being the one for whom they have waited, the Messiah, had been crushed by the powers that be. They were ready, they knew what was to come and how things were to happen in their minds. The meal of power and might that they had spread in their minds had gone profoundly sour. Theirs was a earthy expectation. There was nothing to be done about it but to wait in the hope that the next Messiah would finally fulfill the promise of God's life giving action for God's people. They could not believe that God could possibly be at work in these miserable circumstances.

But Jesus comes all the same to make their joy complete. Jesus comes and meets them where they are as they are. It in is the basic human numb-response to trauma that the risen Christ comes and opens up the way of the kingdom as they walk along. It is the very one who knew

nothing of what was *Really* going on through the eyes of the disciples that explains what was actually happening in their very midst. Reality in its harshness crushes us and convinces us that the story is over. But in Christ, in the resurrected reality, the story, even at its most painful, continues in the midst of the loving, life giving God working in the midst of the mess. The thing we hate most about God's resurrection is that it requires death. Even for we who proclaim the risen Christ, it just rubs us the wrong way. New life should come, but it should not require that much new of us. But oh friends, Oh people of God—even at this price, the resurrection remains real. The risen Christ meets us even where we least expect him, and we are least able to recognize him, and brings life anew, turning the ordinary extraordinary time and again, bringing life out of even the most deadly of situations.

The reality of the resurrection and the truth that it holds is not first and foremost a reality of the grave and the declaration angels, or the complete comprehension of those who witness the sight. As important as that is, we are met in far more personal ways than even that. We celebrate “He is not here” and “the stone has been rolled away”, but so too do we celebrate “I have perceived God with us even here and even now. The resurrection reality is a reality of Jesus meeting his disciples, meeting us, in our ordinary lives, in the pit of their despair and the peak of joy, coming to them and walking with each of us. Christ is risen and the revealing the active, working, loving will of God in our world permeates our very reality, and is held by our every hope. God's will and God's mission could not be stopped by powers and principalities that did their worst and it cannot be stopped, will not be stopped by the incomprehension of God's Kingdom by the children of God. The promise of Easter is the promise that even when we only see the powerlessness of reality, God is there creating life. Easter has come and the empty tomb is present even when the world claims that death consumes us, be it physical, psychological, emotional, or spiritual death. Even here we will be raised up and made new again. Even here we will know the joy of the Lord. Resurrection reality is present even when our enemies triumph and God's kingdom seems only like a glimmering hope of fairy tale; still God is there. God is there not because we as disciples of Christ say the right things, respond the right way, love with completeness and wholeness of heart, or even comprehend the wholeness that God's new creation can bring to us and our world. Rather God is here through the promise of Easter because God comes to us is love, reaches out to us, pulling us in through love, working in our daily lives, in this world and the next, walking with us, working in us and through us, creating

the resurrected reality of the God's kingdom come to Earth each and every day. YHWH God is there because God in Christ has breached the gap and reconciled all of humanity to YHWH forevermore. God is here because God is love, and nothing can separate us from that love, no matter what.

I will readily confess that this is one of those sermons which I am as likely preaching to myself as I am to you. These are days in which hope and promise seems hard to come by and harder still to navigate. I must confess that I have been distracted by the impossibilities of the world and meanness of our realities, and I have been failing to appreciate the joyful points of resurrection all around us.

But within this confession, I must confess a heart as well burning inside me as well, seeing these times as an opportunity as much as a challenge. My heart burns with a passion for justice and equity to be known fully. My heart burns with the hope of a new day ever dawning, ever hoping, ever changing. My heart burns with the reality of the resurrected Christ walking with us, amid our doubt, in the midst of our fear, in the midst of our blindness to his very presence. My heart burns for this congregation of people seeking a faithful life, knowing the joy of salvation that lies within. My heart is burning with the joy of the world that has changed forever, and the reality of resurrection that is possible.

Mother Teresa is quoted to have said "Joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls. A joyful heart is the inevitable result of a heart burning with love." It is this joy that I wish for you in the face of these challenges. The fact of the matter is, that sometimes we cannot for ourselves see the joy around us. In our reflection time and throughout this week I challenge you to look for joy along the roadside. Look for hope amidst challenge. Look for flowers among your fear. Maybe you have seen some already; share them with us; help us all to see the resurrection surprises in our midst. And may we be willing always to be filled with the joy of the resurrection happened, the resurrection still happening, and ever changing. May we recognize the resurrection in the breaking of the bread, and know the Joy of the Lord more fully still. Amen.