

Third Sunday of Easter
Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish
Saint Francisville, LA
30 April 2017

Luke 24:13-35

When I was a young missionary, still in Roman Catholic Seminary in Colombia, South America, I once went to a small village on the mountains outside of Medellin, for a two-week mission. Life in this small area was as tough as it could be. Over 90% of the people lived in great poverty. Two families controlled all the farms, commerce, and most of the housing in the area. You either worked for one or the other family, or you tried to make it on your own, which was even harder to do. I remember seeing in house after house posters of American like Madonna or Michael Jackson. I remember pointing to an old poster of Elvis once and asking a young man of about 14 why he liked Elvis. He responded, "I don't know that man and I don't even understand what he sings about. But, when I look at his picture I am reminded that the world is bigger than this village. And that gives me hope.

Hope. This is exactly what the passage today is all about. The two disciples going back home after witnessing the passion and crucifixion of Jesus are feeling as hopeless as anyone can feel. Their world has been turned upside down. As they leave Jerusalem they remember the excitement and the joy they experienced as disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. He was a great prophet who was able to do great miracles and signs. He was charming and funny. He was as smart as they come. He had a passion for history and was able to interpret the nation's past in a unique way. He was charismatic and extremely personable. When he spoke to you and looked you in the eye you always felt as though he was seeing directly into your soul. He was authentic and filled with a kind of love they had never seen before. When they were with Jesus they felt loved, forgiven and accepted.

But he was dead now, and all that was left to do was to return home. Back to the hopeless existence of share-croppers in a land owned by others and controlled by Rome. They had hoped that Jesus was the one spoken about in Holy Scriptures. They had hoped he would redeem Israel from the oppressive Romans, and restore it to its promised glory. But now Jesus is dead and there is nothing they can do about it. All they can do is go back home and accept that the way things are is the way things will always be. They had heard that some had seen Jesus alive, but they had not seen Jesus. Most likely the body was just stolen and the women and others are making too much of the empty tomb. People are always looking for hope in the wrong places. Certainly this was one of those cases.

At some point during this conversation, Jesus appears to them, but they can not recognize him. There is something familiar in the stranger, but they can not figure out what it is. He begins to walk with them and to listen to their story, but they do not recognize him until much later on. I have always wondered why they couldn't recognize Jesus. Holy Scripture does not tell us that Jesus' voice changed in any

way as the result of his death, so that he would have sounded differently after the resurrection. Wouldn't they have recognized his voice, his accent, his particular way of speaking? Could it be that they had such a preconceived idea of Jesus that they could no longer recognize him in their midst? Could it be that their own hopelessness got in the way of seeing Jesus?

I can hardly blame them. They had prayed and hoped for a redeemed Israel and yet all they saw around them was an un-redeemed world. Their best hopes for a new life were crucified with Jesus of Nazareth. How can there be any reason for hope left in their world. My friends, many of us are very familiar with these emotions. Many of us have been gripped or are still oppressed by hopelessness and this hopelessness challenges our faith every day. Hope is in short supply as wars continue to rage around the globe. Hope is in short supply as many around the globe continue to be assaulted by terrorism, violence, poverty, unemployment, and even slavery. It is very difficult to recognize the risen Lord, even for us today

The Emmaus Disciples had had the Scriptures which pointed to the Messiah, but could not understand them. It never occurred to them that the death of the Messiah was necessary for the redemption of Israel to take place. Jesus today opens the Scriptures to them and helps them to get a proper understanding. We too have our Holy Scriptures and they tell us that Jesus is alive and that he is in our midst, but still we have a hard time seeing him in our world.

A famous Lutheran pastor puts it this way, "In the midst of our grieving and hopelessness -- or of our wealth and prosperity, it can still be difficult to recognize the risen Jesus in our midst. It can still be difficult to find the proper understanding of scriptures. But Jesus doesn't give up on disciples who are 'foolish and slow of heart to believe' (v. 25)."

The good news, my friends is that Jesus breaks into our world and changes us from the inside out. Last week we saw him breaking into the Apostle's world by showing up in a locked room. Today he shows up as other disciples are walking home. He is not repelled by our doubts or by our faithlessness. Just the opposite, he will continue to break into our life to "open" our eyes, to open our hearts, to open our minds. It is through his intervention in our lives that a proper interpretation of Holy Scripture is even possible. It is only through his love and his grace that we can see his face reflected in the face of our brothers and sisters.

The good news is that he lives and he walks among us. We are not alone in this lonely planet. We have not been forgotten by God. There is nothing that can separate us from his love. So, today, I invite you to have courage. He lives! He is among us, even if we can not recognize him at times. He is among us. Our Redeemer lives! Alleluia. May he open the eyes of our hearts that we may see him in our midst. Amen!