

Third Sunday in Easter
Year A, RCL
April 26, 2020
North Fork Ministries
Gospel:
Luke 24:13-35

On the first day of the week, two of Jesus' followers were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 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?" 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, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 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. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 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. 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." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 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. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

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When I was 22, just out of college, I didn't have many more possessions than the Jesus followers that walked the dusty roads between Jerusalem and Emmaus. Most of my worldly burden would fit neatly into the backpack I slung over my shoulders. And like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, I didn't have any real expectation of encountering Jesus on my travels. My wanderlust had carried me

to small fishing village overlooking the Gulf of California on the west coast of Mexico - a place called Topolobampo. The beaches were beautiful - largely undiscovered by Americans and still unspoiled. The fishing was good. Good enough to provide a livelihood to a substantial number of the residents of Topolobampo.

Early one afternoon, I was sitting on a rock beside the tidewater channel that carries the fishing boats into and out of the broad bay that spills into the vastness of the Pacific Ocean. An ancient wooden fishing vessel, not much different than the fishing boat sailed by Peter, James, and John when they first encountered Jesus, one equipped with oars in case the equally ancient motor failed, sputtered into my vista. The captain killed the engine, tilted the outboard motor, exposing the propeller to the air, and the boat gently glided from the water onto the sand.

Seven or eight fishermen disembarked - the youngest was perhaps 16. The oldest had skin so lined and weathered by the ravages of salt and sun, that he could have been a hundred. They acknowledged my presence with a nod and then, as if the event were choreographed, each of the fishermen moved through his paces. One stowed away the nets and gear, another pulled onions and peppers and limes from a bag. Another slid a large, very sharp, knife from its scabbard, and with the midday sun reflecting on the blade, began to slice the fruit and vegetables. Without instructions, the youngest crew member took a burlap bag from the boat and carried it to the waters' edge, where he rinsed the sand away from dozens of salt water clams.

The captain took his knife and adroitly opened each clamshell, spilling the shimmering contents into a large stainless steel bucket, newly rinsed with saltwater from the bay. Noticing my interest, he called to me, "Tienes hambre?" "Are you hungry?" With only a moment's hesitation, I answered, "Si".

I wandered down to the center of their bustling kitchen on the sand, and we began to talk - about fishing mostly and that day's catch. They agreed that it had been good, but like fisherman everywhere, they could remember days when the fishing had been better and then, as fishermen do, we told lies about the ones that had gotten away.

And as we talked, the raw clams marinated in the mingling of onions, peppers, lime and cilantro and the flavors of food and new friendship fused together. When we could wait no longer, we gathered in a circle, and sat on the ground. Tortillas warmed by the sun, were passed about, followed by the bucket of clams and each of us filled our expectant tortillas with the gifts of the sea. A more succulent meal I can't recall. I've eaten ceviche at least a hundred times since, and I can't replicate the experience of that circling bucket of clams - the communion we shared.

When the shellfish were all eaten and ours stories exhausted, the near-empty

bucket was passed around to me. The captain looked in my direction and said, "Rogelio, bebelo". I understood what he said the first time, but as I peered at the bottom of the bucket and saw the liquid remains of clam juices and lime - the fragments of broken tortillas and particles of sand, I hesitated and asked politely, "Mande?" "Pardon?"

"Bebelo," he answered, "Drink it". I knew had no choice. The offer to drink the juices that remained from our meal was an honor I could not refuse. So, I raised the bucket to my lips and, I assure you, a more perfect beverage I have never tasted. I passed round this outsized common cup to the grinning fishermen, and our Eucharistic feast was complete.

We don't know why the Jesus' followers were headed to Emmaus - what they hoped to accomplish there or who they were going to see or what they were going to do. Yet as they journeyed there, the risen Christ appeared to them.

They traveled together, talking of the miraculous events that had taken place and still the disciples failed to recognize Jesus – until they offered him hospitality. "Stay with us, they said, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over."

And Luke tells us that, "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. It was then that their eyes were opened, and they recognized him." That is why we share communion every Sunday, so that we too can recognize the Christ in the breaking of the bread. And it is why we offer an invitation to everyone who walks through our doors, to share with us in the Eucharistic feast. It is why, before communion, you always hear me say something like, "No matter where you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome at Christ's table."

Theologians speak of it as a "Christophany" – an appearance of the risen Christ. As we practice hospitality, at the altar by inviting everyone, by breaking bread together in our coffee hour, by welcoming the stranger as if he were Jesus, we move beyond mere friendliness to a place where Christ appears in every face we meet.

We are all fellow travelers, breaking bread together. It's not so different from the experience of Cleopas and the other disciple, as they walked the lonely road to Emmaus, talking and discussing, encountering the inquisitive stranger, and then over the breaking of bread, recognizing the risen Christ in their midst.

Neither is it so different from what we were accustomed to doing here every Sunday morning. At the altar, where together we shared the broken body and blood of Christ, and again in the parish hall, where we broke bread together, and shared our stories and our lives. Each experience was cut from the same cloth,

providing an opportunity to create community and to recognize Jesus standing at our side. It is in the breaking of bread together, that we know the Christ.

Yet now, in this extraordinary time, we no longer come to the altar to share the broken body and blood of Christ, we don't gather in the parish hall for coffee and conversation. If we encounter someone coming towards us on the sidewalk, we swerve away from one another. And now the very idea of drinking the juices remaining from a bucket of clams shared with strangers, seems horrifying.

Still, we are an incarnate people, formed of flesh and blood. We were accustomed to hugs and handshakes and the smiles that are now hidden behind an array of surgical masks and handmade face shields. Communion and the physicality of our former lives is becoming a receding memory.

Yet, this time will pass. We are still on the road to Emmaus, in the midst of a journey that will come to an end. In the meantime, as we read this morning in Peter's letter to the Christians in Rome, "...live in reverent fear during the time of your exile, ...love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God." Amen.