

Sermon for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter  
April 6, 2008

Scriptures: 1 Peter 1:17-23  
Luke 24:13-35

### “Sharing the Resurrection”

It is still Easter. True the Easter Bunnies have all disappeared from the store displays; the Easter cards have all been swept from the racks; only a few discounted remnants of chocolate eggs and jelly beans lay disconsolately on a sales table hoping that a sweet-toothed shopper may yet purchase them. The world of commerce has hurried on to whatever next promotion is on the calendar, but it is still Easter.

It is still Easter, because for the church Easter is a season, not a day. It is still Easter, because once again we gather around a word from that first Easter Day. It is still Easter, because the experience and reality of Easter is so much greater than the physical

phenomena of a displaced stone and an empty tomb that can be seen Easter morning.

I grew up in Arizona, and periodically would return there when my children were young. On one such trip, our children asked if we could go see the Grand Canyon. Our time was limited, and that was not on our agenda. So we told them that no, we would not be going there on that trip. They were not to be dissuaded so easily. “How far is it,” they wanted to know. “How long does it take to get there?” I tried to explain to them, not entirely successfully, I am sure, that the problem wasn’t how far away it was, or how long it took to get there. We could have driven there in around 4 hours. The problem was if you drive up to the Grand Canyon, look and turn around and go home, about all you have done is simply looked at a big hole in the ground. A very impressive big hole, to be sure, but still to just look is to see a big hole. To really appreciate the Grand Canyon, you have to mount a donkey and take the trip down into the canyon and spend a couple of days, or ride the Colorado

through at least some of the canyon to truly appreciate what an awesome place it is. It may not be worth several hours of driving to simply peer over the edge.

That is the way it is with Easter. No one was ever convinced of the resurrection by looking into the empty tomb. Much more than that has to happen. In fact the empty tomb can become an unfortunate distraction, as we try to explain some cosmic sleight of hand, or find rational explanations. The Romans said the disciples had removed the body. Mary wondered if the gardener had done it. The disciples dismissed the report as an idle tale, incoherent raving by sorrowing women.

So we come to this story from Easter Evening. The two disciples, one unnamed, one named Cleopas, of whom we hear nothing more – in other words run of the mill, everyday followers, you and I. This story is not from the inner circle. These two had not been to the empty tomb. They were walking home to Emmaus from

Jerusalem. Momentous things had happened in Jerusalem the past few days, and they were disturbed by them. They were heading home to the safe and the familiar.

We know the story – how they were joined on the road by a stranger, who eventually convinced them of the resurrection. I want us to notice carefully how it happened, for the “how” is not insignificant. In fact it is most significant. It comes out of and informs the structure of Christian worship.

This story as it comes to us in its final form in Luke’s gospel is a story that was shaped by those early believers as they began to learn what it meant to worship God in the presence of the resurrected, living Christ, and how that worship participated in the resurrection experience, how worship, indeed, made the resurrection experience possible.

On the road, the stranger opens the scriptures, reads them – in this case from memory – interprets them and proclaims them. He does this in response to their expression of need – “We thought he was the one, we are sorrowful, we have doubts, we have fears.”

We come to worship week after week. Doubts, fears, sorrows, failed expectations crowd in here with us. True worship does not check them at the door. And in response to their remonstrations, we hear through scripture reading, and sermon proclamation God with us, not some strange unknown God, but the God we have always known, still with us.

The experience deepens, for we find that we do not come alone, separate individuals, each hearing God’s Word for me. I can come and look at the empty tomb by myself, but I do not experience the resurrection alone. As those early followers of Jesus began to live into the resurrection, they came to understand the communal nature

of its reality. “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I will be in their midst.” Jesus promised.

“Come in and have dinner with us,” the two said to the stranger.

This is essential to worship – be in our midst, share our lives, join us together – hospitality. It is in this self-giving entangling of our lives with each other, that we are enabled to experience the Risen Lord present with us.

And of course there is the meal itself. A direct reference to the meal we share where bread is broken, eaten together, and eyes are opened again and again to see and know the resurrected Christ.

It is still Easter, and in this gathering as our hopes and fears are confronted and comforted by the Word of God proclaimed, and then made flesh, present in our discovery of the Risen Christ among us as we reach out to each other, serve each other, share our lives, share our bread, Easter becomes much more real, much more

understood than it possibly could have been that first Easter morning.

At Easter in church circles, we often hear comments about CE Christians. A son of one of our members told me, to his mother's evident chagrin, that he was a CE Christian – a Christmas and Easter Christian. I had a fellow leave an Easter service once, and say to me, “Don't you dare wish me a Merry Christmas!”

We have a hard time understanding why so many do that. Of course they have a hard time understanding why we don't. Part of the reason is, they have only seen the empty tomb, and don't know what to make of it. We meet with the Risen Christ, and wonder why they cannot understand that. We would almost certainly do better to wonder how we can be more effective in our hospitality, so that they might experience Easter as we have.

It is still Easter. The Risen Christ comes among us, opens our eyes to his presence in our midst, renews us through his resurrection, and empowers us to share this life-giving experience.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!