

Sermons at Saint Mark's

The Reverend Ralph Carskadden

The Third Sunday of Easter, April 6, 2008

Acts 2:14a, 36-47; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

R.E.S.P.E.C.T.

The gospel story we have just heard tells how two grieving and bewildered disciples of Jesus met a stranger who walked with them as they journeyed seven miles from Jerusalem to a village named Emmaus. It was the third day after their friend and teacher had been executed. The stranger listened to them relate their experience, and they shared what had been their hope for their future, their understanding of who their friend had been and their grief over what had happened. They told how other disciples had said that Jesus might be alive. But in their sadness they could not imagine it being true. The stranger then reminded them of another story, the story of God's loving actions and purpose as revealed in scripture.

When the three sojourners reached Emmaus the two disciples extended hospitality to the stranger and compelled him to share a meal with them. As he broke bread their eyes were opened and they recognized him as the Risen Lord. He then disappeared from their sight. In joy they rushed back to Jerusalem to relate to the other disciples what they had experienced and once there they learned that Jesus had appeared to others, also.

This morning, on this Third Sunday in Eastertide I come to you at the appointment of our Bishop and the invitation of your Vestry, to be priest-in-charge, to be present with you in the early months of a transition. I know that some of you are grieving, some are bewildered over the resignation and departure of your pastor and leader. Any change of this magnitude in such a large and active congregation brings forth feelings, including fear, anger, sadness, loss, betrayal, as well as, relief and a desire to move on.

In making connections with today's gospel, especially given the season of the year in which these things have transpired, it needs to be clear

that Robert your former dean is not Jesus who was crucified, and I am not the Risen One come to save you! However, today's gospel does offer us insights for the work that lies before us as we journey together. Like the stranger I offer you the opportunity to tell your story and relate the feelings you have about what has taken place. Your capable Lay Leadership Training Team has already provided contexts where you can do that with one another – in the forums between services on Sundays and on Wednesday evenings. Because this is an emotionally charged time and you each have differing experiences, it is imperative that we have norms for how we can be in conversation, how we can listen to one another in ways, which are safe and respectful. The Lay Leadership Training Team has some excellent guidelines borrowed from Fr. Eric Law's racial justice and diversity work. Based on the word **RESPECT** the guidelines invite participants to: **R** – Be RESPONSIBLE for what you say and feel without blaming others; **E** – Be EMPATHETIC, listen with the ears to your heart; **S** – Be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles; **P** – PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak; **E** – EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions; **C** – Avoid CROSSTALK, let others be heard; **T** – TOLERATE ambiguity – this is not about being right or wrong. Out of my work with the Anti-Racism Training Team of the diocese I would suggest two more guidelines: **Confidentiality** – what we share should not be told to others unless we have given permission. In popular parlance we would say "What happens at St. Mark's, stays at St. Mark's." Finally, practice "**Both/And**" thinking. Often the truth is multi-faceted. Several things can be true at once – and usually are.

The stranger in the gospel story not only listened to his fellow sojourners as they related their

story, he reminded them of the larger story of God's loving actions. Their experience had a context, a holy context, as does ours. This morning I would remind you that during this 50 day long Easter season we hear how the Risen Jesus appeared and related to his friends. When they were gathered in fear behind locked doors he appeared in their midst not to reproach them for abandonment or betrayal, nor blame them for their temerity or inaction. He came into their midst, breathed forgiveness over them and commissioned them for ministries of reconciliation.

In time I trust we will all have a better understanding of the past, of what has happened here, not only in recent years but in past decades. As someone who was fired during a previous administration I can well imagine we will want to understand the past year in light of a much longer saga. As we understand the past we can make changes for the future health and stability of this remarkable and vibrant community. But for now my concern is for the present and how we support and encourage one other, in this time of change. I believe it is essential that this great cathedral community continues its remarkable tradition of waging peace and working for justice – people near and far and the creation around us need our attention and care! There is work to do on a master plan, on mission and strategy as we continue to move into the future to which God is calling us!

The context in which we do this as followers of Jesus is modeled for us in the Second Chapter of the Book of Acts. Verses 42-47 do not appear on the back of the bulletin (you will hear them again next week). But hear them and recognize in them a description of our shared life: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread (Luke's term for Eucharist) and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,

praising God and having goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."

Teaching and fellowship, Eucharist, prayer, awe and wonders, care for those in need, hospitality, generous hearts, welcoming of new members – you heard some of these words in the baptismal covenant last week; these are words which describe life at St. Mark's! In these actions we encounter the Risen Christ, in the breaking of the bread and "in all his redeeming work." This is the life I come to share with you. Beginning today.

I close with an observation, and a playful invitation.

This is a very public place. This "Holy Box" sits majestically exposed on the brow of Capitol Hill, aglow at night, a beacon for all to see. When things happen here, folks in the city, region and diocese read about it and know about it. For better or worse we are in the public eye as we move through this time of transition. We do well to remember the closing lines of the second reading for today, "love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew."

After my appointment was announced on Friday I began getting emails from friends, colleagues and people from St. Mark's wishing me well and promising to pray for me, as they are already praying for you. One clergy colleague made a suggestion I think is a good idea. I invite you, starting next Sunday, to sit someplace where you have never sat before. And do the same each Sunday I am here. In so doing you can experience a number of different perspectives on things! As Martha Stewart would say, that could be a "good thing".

Alleluia! Christ is risen!