

Second Easter - 4/11/10 – Luke 24:13-35 – Walking Together

One of the things I love about this time of year is taking early evening walks with my wife. How many of you walk together with a spouse, friend or child? It's great to get out of the house, see the earth bursting with color while doing something healthy. Walking helps clear the head. It's a great stress reducer; it can give us a new perspective. As with other couples, Kay and I use this time to engage in conversation. While walking can be a diversion, it can also be the context to open a door into our inner world of feelings. Feelings add color and texture to our lives; they're not rooted in logic but emotion. They can be scary and certainly are mysterious. They need to be explored rather than judged as they help us understand how we experience the world; they unlock the door to awareness about ourselves. Walking together can provide an opportunity to think back on the day, explore how it has affected us, and gain insight into where to go next.

Such was the occasion in our Gospel lesson from Luke. It's a great story and serves as a wonderful metaphor about how we often experience the risen Jesus. Two disciples, Cleopas and an unnamed man, were walking from Jerusalem to their home in the village of Emmaus, some 7 miles west. Seven miles is a long way to walk and talk. Perhaps that is what they needed in order to process Jesus' death. The feelings surrounding his death were still raw. They couldn't imagine that anyone in Jerusalem hadn't heard about this travesty of justice. They were consumed with disappointment as their hopes of deliverance had died with him on the cross. Now they were making their way home, processing the events as they walked, and trying to figure out how to go on without him. As they walked along the way, a stranger joined them and entered into their conversation. He didn't press. Gently he inquired, "What are you talking about?" He listened as they poured out their disappointment and confusion. Then he offered a new perspective, another way to see these events, perhaps with more objectivity, certainly with more clarity. Maybe God's way was not their way. There was no judgment; just another way of seeing how the grace of God might be at work.

Isn't this our experience too? When life becomes confusing or overwhelming, when our hopes and dreams have caved in and we find ourselves suffocating, gasping for breath and direction, it's helpful to walk and talk with a trusted friend; someone with whom we can share our feelings without fear of judgment; someone with whom we can reflect and explore. To the casual observer, these moments are nothing out of the ordinary. It's just co-workers walking together at lunch or spouses after dinner. But to the ones who are walking together, these are sacred times as we open windows into our lives and seek to make sense out of life. As the conversation weaves its way with compelling words and urgent questions, truths about ourselves begin to emerge – what is important or dispensable, what we value or are willing to give up. We begin to see things from a different perspective. This is the unfolding of the mystery of Christ's presence in our lives. Christ enters our conversation and walks with us in community.

Frederick Buechner writes: "The sacred moments, the moments of miracle, are often everyday moments, the moments which, if we do not look with more than our eyes or listen with more than our ears, reveal only the gardener (as with Mary Magdalene), or a stranger coming down the road behind us or a meal like any other meal (as with the two men on the road to Emmaus). But if we look with our hearts, if we listen with all our being and our imagination, what we may see is Jesus himself. What we may hear is the first faint sound of a voice somewhere deep within us saying that there is a purpose in this life, in our lives, whether we can understand it completely or not. This purpose follows behind us through all our doubting and being afraid, through all our indifference and boredom, to a moment when suddenly we know for sure that everything does make sense because everything is in the hands of God."

One of the ways I've experienced this walking together is with a small group of men with whom I meet each month. As a way of walking together between our meeting times, we pray for each other and read the same devotional material. When we meet, each of us has a chance to talk about our journey and how we're experiencing life. We share our joys and explore our concerns. Gently we peel back the feelings to gain awareness. There is no judgment as we look at where and how the risen Jesus might be leading us or working in the given situation. Conversation leads us into community, and in community we experience the presence of the Risen Christ.

As we make our way from Jerusalem and the celebration of Easter, I hope each of us has or will find a group of people with whom to walk, share the journey of life, and help each other deal with disappointment and loss as we try to make sense of why things happen the way they do. God has created us to be in community. As we trust each other enough to have open, honest conversations, as our sharing leads to closeness and community, we'll discover that this is the very context in which Christ heals our lives and restores our hope. That's why walking together is so critical to our life in Christ.