

**3 Easter Yr A**  
**May 8, 2011**  
**The Rev. Gene B. Manning**  
**Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Ps 116;**  
**1Peter 1:17-23; Lk 24:13-35**

St. Augustine said,

“We are an Easter people  
and alleluia is our song!”

I dare say, all of us here  
agree with that.

We proclaim Christ crucified  
as Lord and Messiah.

We are followers  
of the risen Christ.

It is not so difficult for us to feel  
or confess the truth  
of our proclamation  
only a few weeks out from the dawn  
of Easter morning.

The memory of our glorious worship  
in the Paschal mystery,  
adorned with the fragrance of incense  
and blooming flowers,  
enveloped in the words of Holy Scripture  
and the sounds of angel voices  
coming from the balcony  
are still fresh in our mind's eye  
and hopefully  
in the warmth of our hearts.

But surely,  
as we travel on,  
away from the empty tomb,  
and life seems pretty much the same  
with all of its responsibilities,  
heartaches, broken promises,  
shattered dreams,  
missed opportunities,

we, like Cleopas and his companion,  
begin to slip back,  
strain our necks,  
to look for that man Jesus,  
the way he used to be,  
mighty in deed and word.

We double check  
to make sure  
the women at the tomb got it right.  
We hope and wonder if he was/is  
the One to redeem us,  
to take the broken pieces  
of our lives  
and make us whole  
make us the holy people of God.

Cleopas and his friend  
have left Jerusalem for Emmaus,  
a seven mile journey back  
to the old way of being.

They walk along carrying  
not only their packs  
but confusing memories  
and the heaviness of their hearts.  
Their infant hopes for the messianic age  
have been dashed  
by the angel of death.

They have heard the Easter proclamation  
from Mary Magdalene and the other women  
but they do not yet know it  
in the marrow of their soul.

On this sad and lonely road  
as the shadows lengthen  
and evening comes  
a stranger appears,  
falls into step with them  
and joins their journey.  
The very One they had been looking for.

Yet, "their eyes were kept from recognizing him."  
Why?  
Why this strangeness  
and mystery of the risen Jesus?

I do not think we can answer  
for those two in Luke's story,  
just as we cannot answer those questions  
for others,  
be they family, friends, or strangers.

As the old saying goes,  
we do not have a window  
into the soul of another.

But God asks us, each of us,  
in our own hearts and souls  
to seek understanding

as to why and how  
we miss the risen Lord in our midst.  
How we fail to recognize  
the very One who saves us.

Is our eyesight made myopic  
by our own selfish desires?  
Do we fail to recognize our own place  
in the passion narrative  
that leads to resurrection?  
Do our wounded hearts  
blind us?

Do we want our Lord  
to meet our needs,  
our expectations?  
To be who we want him to be?  
Or is there something more  
we are missing?

Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury,  
offers this,  
“In Cleopas’ little speech,  
Luke takes us into the very middle  
of that reconstruction  
and redirection of understanding  
that is the Easter experience,  
the process in which  
we are forcibly parted  
from the consoling recollection assimilated with ourselves  
and confronted with one  
who is still and forever *other*....  
Jesus as risen  
is a Jesus who cannot be contained  
in the limits  
of a past human life.”<sup>1</sup>

Before the disciples could even listen  
to the stranger  
Luke tells us,  
“they stood still.”  
They stop right where they are  
to encounter this person in their midst.  
A small detail in our text  
but a profound and necessary  
posture before God.

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<sup>1</sup> Rowan Williams, *Resurrection, Interpreting the Easter Gospel*, (Harrisburg: Morehouse, 1982) 82, 83.

Jesus pulls out his pocket version  
of the Torah scrolls,  
complete with the Prophets.  
He opens the Word of God to them  
and shows them God's movement  
before the foundation of the world.  
He tells them he is connected  
to the faith tradition of their past.  
He is the hope of their future.  
They must learn him afresh,  
as from the beginning.

Imagine what must be going through  
their minds.  
No doubt, they ask themselves a question.  
The same question  
we hear in our first reading this morning from Acts.

Peter stands before a diverse crowd  
gathered around the apostles  
on the day of Pentecost.  
He recounts salvation history,  
and tells them of Christ's victory  
over the cross,  
which draws them into the ever present  
and always unfolding story  
of God's love for humanity  
of God's redemption  
of the world.

They are cut to the heart  
and in response  
they ask themselves a question –  
not for themselves alone  
but for the world  
for God.

“What should we do?”  
Now that our eyes  
are beginning to open,  
what should we do?

This was Cleopas' question.  
This was the question  
of the newly baptized at Pentecost.  
It is our question  
in the light of Easter's dawn.

Before we even begin  
to form an answer,  
might we stop and stand still.  
Then turn around.

Listen to the strange One.

And in that turning  
invite our Lord to stay with us  
as we start back toward Jerusalem  
and the glory of the cross.

In so doing perhaps  
we can stop struggling  
to interpret Jesus' story  
in light of our own.

And allow the Holy Spirit  
to help us interpret ourselves  
in the light of the Easter event.

For when we interpret Jesus' story  
up against our own  
we place ourselves before God.

When we interpret ourselves  
in the light of the death and resurrection of our Lord  
we put God at the center.  
our lives become new,  
not without heartache and pain,  
not without the knowledge and memory  
of our own waywardness and sinfulness,  
but new in the risen Christ.

The eyes of our faith open  
and our love becomes genuine  
as we love one another deeply from the heart.

Cleopas invites the stranger into his home  
to sit at his kitchen table.  
He quickly discovers he is the guest  
in his own home.

For the one who sits before him  
who blesses and breaks the bread  
is none other  
than the risen Lord.

In this moment of tangible love  
God embraces the brokenness of betrayal  
and the cross  
and allows the rays of Easter sunrise  
to illumine and warm their hearts  
and to quicken their souls.

They cannot contain themselves.  
So they go for a night-time run  
down the moonlight road  
back to Jerusalem  
with the good news  
spiraling outward into the world.

Through his strangeness  
our Lord reminds them and us  
we do not get to define God,  
rather God,  
through the risen Christ  
defines us.

“Brothers and sisters,  
what should we do?”  
The tomb is empty.  
Death is defeated.

Do we go back to our old ways  
or do we run with the message of new life,  
the promise given to us,  
to our children and our children’s children,  
the promise of forgiveness,  
mercy and new birth?

On this day,  
at this, God’s altar,  
be known to us Lord Jesus  
in the breaking of the Bread.

In this moment of tangible love  
draw us deeper into a living relationship with you  
where our eyes might behold  
the truth of your presence.

For we are indeed an Easter people  
and truly alleluia is our song.