



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

Luke 24:13-35

NRSVUE

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.^[b] ¹⁸ 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?" ¹⁹ He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth,^[c] who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.^[d] Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah^[e] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ When he

was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us^o while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

It is hard for me not to seek some sort of retribution when I feel wronged. Oh, don't get all judgy I know you're the same!

As a self-described Jesus follower, I must hide my desire for retaliation inside a sweet exterior, but the bitter nougat of the center is served my own version of justice.

Perhaps Jesus knew the human condition so well because he'd observed the devil's appeal to his in the wilderness. Jesus never forgot that after his willingness to go through depravation and suffering there were angels to minister to his weary mind and body.

Knowing he would be tortured, publicly scorned, and then killed Jesus could have arranged a meeting in the upper room to prepare his followers to take back Judea. To gather all their feelings of anger and sadness and make the killers pay for what they would do to him.

They could levee justice upon the heads of anyone who participated in his crucifixion.

Perhaps they could take control of the land and put their guys in charge of every influential part of Judea.

They could win cities for Jesus with rallies. They might start teaching the children that Jesus died because they are bad little girls and boys. A whole army will grow up in the name of Jesus, motivated by the suffering and eventual death he endured.

Children are impressionable and will do anything for those who say they can be a part of a club of "believers" who will go to a place where bad guys will never exist. All too often so am I.

This is how the prideful religious person in me has the potential to behave if I don't re-member.

It happens every time my heart wants revenge. Every time my soul aches with the need to be right. Every time I don't think, to love and be loved, is enough.

But greater love has no person but that they lay down their life for their friends. Even in the middle of the intense feelings of despair, grief, sadness and anger and the hunt for who caused it.

Jesus is saying to me in these passages that I will feel these things when I experience inner conflict, but do not let it spill into actions of injustice. Instead, remember the Passover meal where Jesus himself was the meal.

In the bread we break we give thanks for the surrendered way of Jesus. Whenever we share in the cup of Christ's shed blood, we give thanks for this new life-giving way, The Way. No one comes to goodness but through the way.

Some call this way the Paschal mystery. The descent into hardship, suffering and losing perceived control rather than avoiding it. Dying to ourselves and freeing our restless souls to a higher union of love.

The only way is to trust the process of being in the belly of the whale of darkness and confusion. The path of transformation will always have resurrection, not in a one-time event but everyday where death is transformed.

In the upper room Jesus is saying to his friends, there is no other route but suffering when we give ourselves to this "scary pattern" as Richard Rohr calls it.

Franciscan sister and scientist Ilia Delio expresses the pattern this way,

"Christianity can help us realize that death and resurrection are a part of the evolutionary path toward wholeness; letting go of isolated existence for the sake of deeper union. Something dies, but something new is born - which is why out of the chaos our times is, in a strange way, a sign of hope; something new is being born. Out of chaos, a star is born. Breakdown can be a breakthrough if we recognize a new pattern of life struggling to emerge." – ilia Delio, "Hope in a time of crisis," The Omega Center newsletter March 2020.

Those words by Ilia were written during the chaos of Covid.

During Covid, did we perhaps become fixated on the conflicts, the misery and the obstacles rather than the pattern of death and resurrection Jesus was inviting his followers to embrace? Perhaps we could have seen a better culture born if a few of us would have re-membered the upper room, the crucifixion and the resurrection.

As a community, one of the ways we do this is by 'passing the peace' in the midst of our chaos. Jesus said, "Peace be with you." We sometimes use it as a hello, yet It is not simply a greeting, it is a pronouncement of the journey on the Paschal mystery.

So, we remember the way of Jesus.

Jesus does not leave the disciples in the upper room experience. He attaches the bread with his body and the wine with his blood so they would have a tangible remembrance when he is physically gone.

After the resurrection the disciples were lost in their lonely, blind eyes of sadness but they were opened.

After Jesus' brutal death, some of the disciples do not recognize Jesus when he as a "stranger, "goes on a long walk then returns with them for a meal. Then, suddenly he takes the bread and breaks it with his nail-scarred hands and pours the wine. They remember!

What a glorious playful scene!

Another time, a stranger appears to some of Jesus's 'fishers of men' who are frustrated and fruitless in their fishing. IN their angst and he helps them gather fish from the ocean. Then he appears on the shore to them saying "come eat breakfast." I have to laugh with joy as I read this account! They remember.

May we not only remember the Eucharist or communion as a sacrament but also remember the body and blood of Jesus on his path of resurrection and our path of renewal.

At the Passover meal the words Jesus used, according to the gospel writers, have become connected to the church and labeled "the words of institution." It has caused the ritual to at times become a magical superstition for cleansing. But what if we, like the disciples, allow our eyes to be opened in the moment of our angst. Perhaps the words of institution will transform into "the words of recognition." The recognition that he is risen and so are we. It is Jesus' way of saying, "I see you" and we, respond "I am here."

It is now ours to recognize the love and life of Jesus in all those around us. Especially the hungry, poor, oppressed and the strangers. Break bread with them and declare the blessing, "peace be with you." Not has a hello but as a collective and transformative experience.

Remember – "If we die to our way we will also rise with Christ." Romans 6:5-11

Remember – "greater love hath no person than this, that they lay their life down for their friends." – John 15:13

Consider yourselves alive to God, for it is in God we live and move and have our being!

Peace be with you!

Amen