

The Rev. Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
3rd Sunday of Easter/Year A/60th Anniversary Celebration
April 30, 2017
Text: Luke 24: 13-35

“Stay with us!”

“Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!”

It was on the same day, the first day of the week that two confused and broken hearted disciples walked along the road to Emmaus. Life was just as surreal now as it had been after they and the other disciples first met Jesus but even more so now. Their Friend and Teacher was dead.

Cleopas and the other disciple found themselves hiding behind locked doors with the others unable to think, to sleep, and to be themselves because of fear of being caught. But soon the walls seemed to close in on them. They needed to get out, if only for a few hours, perhaps a day or two, but the two could not persuade any of the others to join them so they decided to take their chances. The two disciples found themselves trudging along the dusty road that pointed toward Emmaus. An awkward silence was exchanged for conversation as they poured over again and again the events of the past few days. What would happen now that hopes and dreams seemed to have died along with the One they followed? You see, they had come to believe that Jesus was the One, the Messiah, sent by God to save their people. And what of the women's claim that Jesus' tomb was empty? Was Peter delusional too? Things couldn't be any bleaker.

Suddenly a Stranger joined them on the road. Someone they did not recognize. He asked them, *“What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”* Cleopas and the other disciple could only look at one another in disbelief. Didn't this man have a clue about what had gone on in Jerusalem? Was there anything else going on in the world?

Cleopas and the other disciple told the Stranger as best they could about Jesus of Nazareth and the events of the last few days and the early morning hours. How Jesus was greeted by crowds with palm branches and hosannas and how the leaders finally handed him over to be killed and how just that morning the women were telling tales of angels and an empty tomb.

They said “*We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*” “We had hoped that he was the *one.*”

As they continued their seven mile walk, the Stranger then began to tell Israel’s story and unpack the scriptures beginning with the prophets. It had been awhile since they heard anyone teach like this Traveler. Yet they still did not recognize the One whose company they kept.

It was nearing the end of the day and the sun was setting when the trio arrived in the village where they were going. The Stranger was about to move on when they asked him to stay with them a little while longer. And when they finally sat at the table, the Stranger took the bread, blessed it and broke it. It was in this moment that they saw and recognized Jesus, alive in their midst. In a flash he vanished from their sight.

Cleopas and the other disciple were so excited that they could not keep their experience to themselves. They quickly walked back to Jerusalem to tell the others about their encounter with Jesus. What had been a road of despair and uncertainty was transformed into a road of unspeakable joy and fulfillment as the risen Christ made himself known to them “in the breaking of the bread.”

Sisters and brothers, the Easter story did not stop on that particular first day of the week some 2,000 years ago. It continues to this day as Christ’s presence continues to be made known in the world.

There is a Gospel song that I love. The lyrics say in part:

*We’ve come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord;
Trusting in his holy word, He’s never failed me yet.
O, can’t turn around. We’ve come this far by faith.**

On April 28, 1957, 83 Episcopalians met for worship in the basement of a house not far from here. St. Barnabas has come a long way since its humble beginnings. They shared the Word as it spoke to them in Morning Prayer. The sharing of the Word and Sacrament continues here in this church as we celebrate our 60th anniversary here in the heart of Florissant.

On this road of faith, this parish family has supported one another, shared stories, joys and pains, celebrated new births and watched as families

grew and children went off to college. We've gotten older together and celebrated the lives of friends who now rest with God. We've watched as clergy and families and individuals moved on. We have, like so many other churches, witnessed and grappled with the ups and downs of membership, the upkeep of facilities, budgets, and deficits. A changing neighborhood, a changing and complex society, and even the direction of the greater Church leaves us pondering at times, our place in it all. We wrestle with dreams, limitations, and hopes for the future. In this ebb and flow that mimics our own personal lives, sometimes we have eased on down the road while at other times we travel the road to Emmaus like Cleopas and the other disciple, unsure and unknowing BUT sisters and brothers, never alone.

And this is where we find the Good News because it is on this road that we are reminded that the risen Christ comes to us and with us walks as a Friend and not a stranger. It is on this road that we meet Him every time we gather for Eucharist, offering us a chance to recognize and encounter him in the Word proclaimed and as we gather at his Table to offer, bless, and break bread together. It is on this road that we find the strength to be the hands and feet of Christ, to be witnesses of the risen Lord.

Yes, sisters and brothers,

*We've come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord;
Trusting in his holy word, He's never failed us yet.
O, (we) can't turn around. We've come this far by faith.*

I hope and pray that our hearts will continue to burn in the knowledge and love of Christ. Let our prayer be like that of Cleopas and the other disciple, "Stay with us!"

Stay with us and continue to walk with us, Lord! Stay with us so that we may continue to spread the Good News in all we undertake. Stay with us so that we can tell others of 'The One' in whom we hope, in whom we trust, in whom all things can be made new. Stay with us, Lord so we may have the courage to invite others to walk this road with us so that they may encounter the living Christ for themselves. Alleluia. Amen!

*"We've Come This Far by Faith"-by Albert A. Goodson and Richard Smallwood.