

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Each of the Gospel writers tells the Easter story in a different way. For many of us this fact adds a note of authenticity to these accounts of Jesus' Resurrection. These were the jumbled reports of eye-witnesses to the most dramatic moment in human history, when Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead. These were not carefully crafted works of fiction. No one tried to reconcile the differing accounts. They had no desire to convince us that these events really happened. They simply reported what they had experienced.

Last week St. John gave his account of how Jesus appeared to his followers locked behind closed doors out of fear. He calmed them and exhilarated them with a simple greeting, "Peace be with you!" He then reassured them that it was really him by showing them his hands and his side. He was dead, but now he is alive!

At the Easter Vigil St. Matthew told of how Mary Magdalen and the other Mary went to the tomb and found it empty. Filled with fear at the message of the angel, they ran and got Peter and John who were also confounded that the tomb was empty.

But it was St. John who told us that Mary Magdalen stayed by the tomb, weeping. Filled with fear and anguish, through her tears she asks for help from a person she assumes is a gardener, until he speaks her name, "Mary!" and she knows, she just knows, it is him. He is alive!

Today we are delighted by St. Luke's account of these disciples on the road to Emmaus. We don't know why they're going to Emmaus. I think that it's safe to conjecture that, like the other disciples locked behind closed doors, they too are filled with fear and running for their lives. Luke describes them as "looking downcast", then they speak of their disappointment and discouragement, their confusion and their fear. Jesus, who is now walking with them, listens silently to their tale of woe. Finally, unable to take anymore, Jesus says to them, "Oh, how foolish you are!" and he proceeds to teach them. As they listen to him, the disciples can't get enough of him. There's just something about this man who seems about to leave them that they invite him to stay with them. And, so he does. He then takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them. St. Luke tells us, "With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him..." He is alive!

Interesting, isn't it? In this Gospel, how Jesus of Nazareth chooses to reveal himself to his broken, discouraged, frightened disciples as the Risen Christ—in Word and Sacrament-- exactly the same way in which he chooses to reveal himself to us here today.

I have often wondered why it was that the disciples, whether it be those locked behind closed doors or Mary weeping in the cemetery, or these disciples on the road to Emmaus, did not, at first, recognize Jesus. Many Scripture scholars have suggested that in his Risen Body he was transformed in a way that prevented their recognition. I would like to suggest for your consideration another reason—that their fear and sadness and discouragement; their disillusionment and self-absorption; their skepticism and doubt prevented them from recognizing that it was really him. That he was really alive!

We come to this table with some or all of that baggage. Like those disciples on the road to Emmaus, we often feel lost and alone. Just as Jesus listened to the two on the road to Emmaus recount all they had been through in the past week, he invites us to do the same. That is the value of gathering each week for Eucharist. Christ teaches us the meaning of our life experiences in the light of God's Word and where God might be found in those very real circumstances of our lives. Finally, in the breaking of the bread--in Sacrament--he reveals to us that he is with us through it all. We are not alone! He is alive!

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Listen to him teach you in the Word today until your hearts are burning within you. Look for him to make himself known to you in the breaking of bread. Then, turn back, away from the road of fear and sadness and discouragement; the path of disillusionment and self-absorption; the highway of skepticism and doubt. As the disciples on the road to Emmaus turned back to Jerusalem, turn back to that place in your life when you first received him. Turn back to when you first believed. Then, tell your story of faith as boldly as we hear Peter proclaim it today in the Acts of the Apostles. Tell it with your whole heart, tell it with all your life, HE IS ALIVE!