

Traveling the road of CoVid-19 (Reflection by Rev. Peggy McDonagh, April 26, 2020)

My friends, peace be with you, and love and God's grace.

English theologian and poet John Henry Newman wrote, "I sought to see the Face of God, I climbed the highest steeple, But God declared, "Go down again, I dwell with my people."

The story of Jesus is about a man of God who dwelt with the people. It was with people of every walk of life that he, with infinite passion and love demonstrated the presence of God. What we know of Jesus is that he did not preach in the temple or teach in high religious places. His ministry was amongst the people, engaging them in their everyday activities, their struggling humanity, and their search for God's acceptance and love.

In his commentary on Luke 24:13-35, Kirk Bryon Jones wrote, "In the Gospels, Jesus is as interested in savoring ordinary life as he is in passing out extraordinary life. He is so interested in knowledge that as a boy, he lags behind in Jerusalem to learn more, so interested in socializing that he begins his ministry at a wedding feast, so interested in people who are hurting that he becomes a healer. He is so interested in nature that he uses the ordinary lilies of the field to illuminate the extraordinary inside people, so interested in continuing a friendship that he raises Lazarus from the dead, so interested in keeping in touch after he's gone that he offers a lasting memorial to his body and blood. He is so taken with being alive that he refuses to remain dead."

The three post-resurrection sightings of Jesus are stories about people experiencing this same Jesus in the ordinariness of life in a new way. Jesus does not re-appear in familiar places such as in Jerusalem, in the temple, in the garden, or in some grand dramatic reveal, because that was not Jesus' way.

In the road to Emmaus story, we find him on a dusty road outside of Jerusalem heading toward a small village of Emmaus. One commentator mused that perhaps "Jesus was just happy to be breathing and moving about again. Savoring life and its sensations of seeing, smelling, hearing, and touching. He is not doing anything; he is just being."

Upon that same road are two of Jesus' followers, not ones that are known from previous stories. Indeed, one follower is not even named. They are heading back to their home village, still in disbelief, and grieving the loss of their teacher and leader. As they walk, they come upon a

stranger, a foreigner, who joins them. The disciples talk to the stranger about the events of the past few days, the death of their mentor, the rumors of Jesus still being alive, but they don't listen to rumors. It all feels so ordinary, Jesus walking and talking with them.

They do not recognize him; perhaps their eyes were filled with tears, an indication of their sorrow after seeing their friend and teacher die. "Perhaps their fear, doubt, and anxiety have turned them inward, away from the world, in oblivious self-absorption." Many of us can relate to the anxiety, fear, and doubt that can cause us to turn inward, seeking security. By turning inside for protection, we avoid seeing what is in front of us.

It is not just fear and doubt that can cause such inward and limited focus. I believe that many of us are awakening to just how wrapped up we were in the busyness and hectic pace of life pre-virus. I suspect we were not always aware of how much our busy lifestyles caused us to take so much for granted and stop appreciating the important things in life. We did not realize how much we needed to live in the moment and find time to stop, breathe deeply and savor life.

The disciples were preoccupied with their grief but when Jesus began to talk, their hearts felt something. As was his way, he teaches them about what the ancient scriptures had foretold, admonishing them, a little, for their lack of faith. They appear unfazed by Jesus' reprimand; perhaps they were comforted by his words. As they arrive in Emmaus, late in the day, they invite him to their home and later to join them for supper. Once again, Jesus is doing what Jesus does best, sharing meals with people, connecting with others through the very ordinary act of breaking bread. As he savors ordinary life, something extraordinary inevitably occurs. Although he is not the host, Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, and gives it to the disciples – gestures that echo the Passover meal they had shared with him not that long ago.

"Jesus' table ministry was a preeminent way that he showed and shared a depth of love unseen in his time." It is at that moment of familiarity of love, that their eyes see, and their hearts remember. It is no wonder that the disciples' hearts were burning within them. Jesus' words and gestures remind them of how Jesus ate and spent time with those considered unworthy of his attention, people like them. It is understandable that these post-resurrection appearances, in which Jesus breaks bread, is how Jesus was "recognized."

"Some commentators note that Luke uses this story to communicate to those who are missing the physical presence of Christ, that their celebration of the Eucharist is the new way that Jesus is going to be with

them. Just as he fed them prior to the resurrection with his teaching, now he will continue to feed and nourish them in and through the proclamation of the Scriptures and the breaking of the bread. When they (and we) gather together to listen to his Word and break bread, Jesus is truly in our midst.”

(The Pastor's Corner Newsletter, 2017)

My friends, what can we take away from this story? It reminds us that Jesus' ministry occurred in daily life; it happened in the most unlikely places and moments. Jesus savored life as he lived it with others, sitting leisurely on hillsides with friends and crowds, walking through fields, traveling dusty roads, and visiting in homes. Our lives before CoVid-19 were shaped by busyness and packed schedules impeding our ability to savor life and to pay attention with our hearts. Perhaps we missed opportunities in such a life to witness God breaking in and doing new things, and to see how God's love was at work and how that love could be shared.

Now we have been forced to slow down. In so doing, we are being and not just doing, savoring all that we took for granted, and seeing what is in front of us. We were all so inward, looking out for ourselves, caught up in our frantic pace of life that caused us to lose sight of what was in front of us. As Jesus broke bread, the disciples moved from inward to outward-looking, and finally, they saw Jesus in front of them. What made them see was the tangible love that Jesus made known each time he ate with them. We are looking outward now with new eyes, something we have not done for so very long, reaching out in beautiful, amazing, tangible ways to others and expressing God's love in so many acts of compassion.

Just as Jesus touched ordinary living with extraordinary life, we are touching what is now ordinary with extraordinary acts of intentional kindness, concern, grace, and love. We are reaching out more and getting to know one another better, expressing our appreciation for one another more regularly, finding creative ways to stay connected, cooking and baking, and inventing cool things to keep us occupied. Family, friends, and neighbours are re-connecting or connecting for the first time. Perhaps we were always loving, but now we are just expressing it more and in an inspired variety of ways. Our beautiful, authentic humanity is resurrected in this springtime of new life. Hallelujah!!

Following this reflection, we will share the Eucharist together. As Jesus was "made known to the disciples in the breaking of the bread," he is made known to us in every act of communion. The Eucharist is a beautiful dance of the resurrected Jesus known to us in the taking-blessing-breaking-giving. One commentator writes, "the story suggests that we should be looking for a risen Jesus not so much in the form of a single

figure, but rather in precisely this graceful, liberating, choreography of love, which can take all kinds of forms. Just as the disciples came to understand that Jesus was made known to them in each tangible act of breaking bread and act of love, we too celebrate that in each act of breaking bread in communion, and every act of love, Jesus is made known. Jesus is spiritually and tangibly present wherever bread is broken, wherever love is made, wherever injustice is challenged, and wherever our hearts are open wide to others.” Amen.