

Year A, April 30, 2017
3 Easter
Christ Church, Mexia

Alleluia, Christ is risen. (The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.)

Like last week's reading from the Gospel of John, today's reading from Luke seeks to provide evidence that Christ was indeed risen. There are several significant parts in the story of "the road to Emmaus," and I could talk for hours about it - so sit back and relax. Just kidding...

William Barclay refers to this part of scripture as one of the "immortal short stories of the world." For one thing, it describes the courtesy of Jesus - he was prepared to continue walking and not "force himself" on the couple, who did invite him to stay. Just like we have free will to accept or invite Jesus into our lives, or not...

It tells among other things how the couple, and I use the word couple because it is now widely thought it was a man and a woman - Cleopas and his wife, Mary, who after they had recognized Jesus, returned the seven miles or so to Jerusalem to share their experience with the apostles and others with them, even though it must have been very late at night and travel extremely risky. It is hard NOT to share the good news of Christ risen - it is for all people not just a few of us. And some would contend that it is not fully ours until we do share it with others.

However, what is interesting to me, and the focus today, is why the two-couple failed to recognize Jesus until he broke the bread. One could theorize that because Emmaus was west of Jerusalem and they were walking in the late afternoon that the sun was in their eyes. But we also know that they were sad and somewhat confused - trying to understand all of the events of the past three days. It seems reasonable to me this latter focus on themselves and their problems may be the culprit. Such a focus leads to a lack of awareness of what is happening around us. It would certainly seem to be so for us today. Can't you think of a time when you've been distracted by problems or emotions or focused on the task at hand and failed to notice others, or their problems, or God working in your life, or the beauty that surrounds you every day...? It certainly happens to me, and it is something I need to try to correct.

Several years ago, for example, I was driving to Camp Allen for my training. It had been a relatively hard week and I was mulling over

the events that had happened, much like the couple in the gospel – except that I was talking to myself, and that could be another problem. Anyway, I realized I needed something and I asked God to provide it for me. Evening prayer that night was led by Father Bill Adams rather than one of my peers, and through his homily God answered my prayer. Fortunately, by then I was listening, rather than being self-absorbed, and I wasn't just staring at the beautiful trees outside the window, which we faced during the service, as I sometimes did. If I had, I would have missed what I needed; I would not have felt God working in my life. But how many other times have I not been aware? Too many, I fear.

Annie Dillard in her award winning book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, describes the following scene: "About five years ago I saw a mockingbird make a straight vertical descent from the roof gutter of a four-story building. It was an act as careless and spontaneous as the curl of a stem or the kindling of a star.

The mockingbird took a single step into the air and dropped. His wings were still folded against his sides as though he were singing on a limb and not falling, accelerating thirty-two feet per second per second, through empty air. Just a breath before he would have been dashed to the ground, he unfurled his wings with exact, deliberate care, revealing the broad bars of white, spread his elegant, white-banded tail, and so floated onto the grass. I had just rounded the corner of the building when his insouciant step caught my eye; there was no one else in sight. The fact of his free fall was like the old philosophical conundrum about the tree that falls in the forest. The answer must be, I think, that beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will or sense them. The least we can do is try to be there." (repeat last 2) What an elegant way to encourage us to be more present – beauty and grace are all around us!

Joan Chittister agrees. She says, "We see ourselves in action and miss the cocoon around us. As a result, we run the risk of coming out of every situation with no more than when we went into it. ... It is only when we learn to ask what the world around us is saying to us at this very moment, in this particular situation, that we tend to the seedbed of the soul.

Awareness puts us into contact with the universe. ... What do I see here of God that I could not see otherwise? What is God demanding of my heart as a result of each event, each situation, each person in my life?" I love Joan! She has been such an inspiration for me.

We spend so much time looking for God “in all the wrong places” ... when God is right in front of us, in every person, in His marvelous creation that surrounds us. And we miss so much. A person makes us feel bad, and we spend our time being angry with them, defending ourselves, reestablishing our self worth, but never asking why did what that person say or do make us feel bad – what is it telling us about our self or God? Are we are so wrapped up in the minutia of our problems and other things that we can't enjoy life? I remember in graduate school, many, many years ago, I was with a friend and she was cooking dinner. I was following her around whining about all the petty incidents and annoyances that had occurred at work that day. She was smiling politely and listening, until it finally occurred to me what an idiot I was. A beautiful woman was preparing dinner for us, we could be enjoying a wonderful evening together, and I was so tied up with things that were essentially meaningless that neither of us could truly enjoy the moment. I told you I need to work on it.

I'm sure that if you think about it for any length of time, you can recall times like these ... times especially where you have missed the opportunity that God has given you for spiritual growth, self-knowledge or even just enjoyment, a momentary respite from the realities of life. I hope that when you think of the couple on the road to Emmaus, you will be encouraged to work to increase your awareness and to be more present in the moment. Because, “it is when we face God in one another, in creation, in the moment, that (our) real spiritual journey begins.”

Alleluia. Christ is risen. (And the people respond) The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.