

“On the Road to Something New”

Two people were walking down from Jerusalem on the Sunday after the crucifixion. One was named Cleopas and the other traveler is unnamed; that could have been your or me. The two travelers' destination was a town called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked they discussed the events of what we call Holy Week. They wondered where everything went wrong. Just a week ago they were walking into Jerusalem and their leader was being hailed as a new messiah; one anointed by God to free his people. But by week's end everything was turned upside down, as they watched helplessly as Jesus was arrested, tried, and put to death on a cross.

As they walked their discussion was quiet so as not to attract attention from any other traveler. When all of a sudden another someone joined up with them. This traveler seemed to know nothing of the events that were so confusing to them. Somehow he had been in Jerusalem and had missed it all. Yet, when they explained them to him he responded telling them it had to be that way. Then Luke tells us “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” They were fascinated, but still they could not see that it was Jesus.

The key phrase in the two disciples' retelling of the events of that week is, “But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” The hope that these two disciples had, and indeed all of Jesus' followers, had blinded them to what was to be. Just as they could not recognize Jesus as he walked and talked with them, they could not recognize that what had happened was as Jesus foretold. They had expected a certain kind of redeemer, one who was Messiah in a particular way. Because what was happening did not fit into what they expected it was all a confusing disappointment.

We have experienced this in one way or another; although perhaps not as critically as Cleopas and the other disciple did. For example, after the War for American Independence George Washington was such a great hero that many wanted to make him king. Their hope for independence from Great Britain had clouded their vision of what was possible. A bit more recently some will remember July 25, 1965 when Bob Dylan, the leader in the folk music revival, took the stage at the Newport Folk Festival playing electric guitar. Many in the audience booed, because the man who wrote the song “These Times They Are a Changin'” could not possibly change the way he made music.

So it was with Jesus and even his closest of friends and followers. They struggled to comprehend when he foretold of his death and resurrection. Because it was outside of what they could conceive of or hope for they forgot it. Only when Jesus did something familiar and unique, in this case when “he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them” were their eyes opened to see that it was Jesus.

We expect God to work in a particular way. We expect God to do our bidding and in ways that we understand. Despite living sixty-four years and experiencing the wonders and mysteries of God, I still find myself expecting something more Gene-like from God. I let my hopes and desires cloud my vision and stop my hearing.

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The Third Sunday of Easter, Year A
Celtic Morning Prayer 10:30 a.m.
April 26, 2020

We seem not able to recognize God at work until we get the dope slap of a revelation that helps us see rightly and hear clearly that God is with us and preparing for us more than we could ask or imagine. Let us learn from these two disciples and from our own experience so that we can say as e. e. cummings wrote:

“now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened.”