

Sermon for April 18, 2021

“A Never Ending Journey”

The final chapter of Luke narrates back to back appearances of Jesus to His disciples, featuring Luke’s “journey” theme. The first takes place as two dejected disciples encounter a stranger on the way to Emmaus. They did not at first recognize who it turns out to be, namely, the risen Christ. The journey abruptly changes as they rush back to Jerusalem to share the news with the 11, to whom He makes a second appearance. They do not recognize Him either, taking Him to be a ghost. At the end of the second appearance, the risen Lord forecasts a journey on the horizon for the church. As a matter of fact, Luke summarizes the plot-line for the sequel to the Gospel that follows in the book of Acts: “Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24: 47-48)

These appearances are an appropriate end to the Gospel of Luke, which turns the story of Jesus’ life and ministry primarily into a story of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem and offers an appropriate preview to Acts, which presents the church as the continuation of all that Jesus began to do and teach (Acts 1: 2). For Luke, discipleship takes the form of “following Jesus,” of aligning ourselves with His way of life and destiny. As the journey continues in Acts, the church is distinctively described as “The Way.” In this context, Luke invites our reflection on the significance of Jesus’ in our own journeys of faith, which have many twists and turns, some detours, and here and there, a dead end. It would appear not all of us are traveling the same road. Some are on super speed highways,

others are bumping along back roads. Some of us have a perpetual left turn signal on, and just keep turning left. Others have right turn signals on and keep turning right. Some have taken the main road, while others have taken the road less traveled and a lot of us have gotten stuck in traffic. But wherever we are on this 3rd Sunday of Easter, there are questions for all of us to think about, such as “What difference does the presence of the risen Lord make in our journeys? How will we recognize Him when He appears?”

Luke doesn't tell us much about Emmaus or why the two disciples were headed there. Perhaps we should visualize this not so much in geographical terms, but as a “symbolic “ destination: the place we all head for after Easter - - whether a state of mind, disposition of the heart or set of activities. And Jesus could ask us, as he did of the 11, “Why are you frightened, why do you have doubts in your hearts?” For our post-Easter reality through which we currently make our way is a profoundly unsettling one - - given ongoing pandemic challenges, racial strains and reckoning, never ending gun violence, political polarization and endless posturing and widening economic disparities. Emmaus 2021 hardly finds us back to business as usual.

Luke's story also takes place in a tumultuous time. Traumatized disciples explicitly state their hopes have been damaged by the events of Good Friday. Luke presents disciples grappling with primary questions on the mind in the early church: how and where are they (and we) to experience the risen Christ? Questions such as these can only be answered on the road as we make our way toward post-Easter destinations. So keep your

feet moving as you anticipate an encounter with the risen Christ on the other side of Easter, for the church is still on the journey that is the continuation of everything Jesus began to do and teach with an essential role to play in God's cosmic salvific project, still unfolding. Theologian, and popular author, Frederick Buechner observed in his "Wishful Thinking:" "Generally speaking, if you want to know who you really are as distinct from who you like to think you are keep your eye on where your feet take you."

May the spirit of the risen Christ continue to empower us to discern and embody "The Way."

Amen and Amen!