

3 EASTER – Companions on The Emmaus Road

St. Timothy's Episcopal Church

Signal Mountain, Tennessee

April 6, 2008

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On that first Easter morning two people left Jerusalem. They left the community of disciples who were gathered in the upper room. They left carrying their burden of despair and disappointment – broken-hearted. They left their dreams, now shattered on the cross. Jesus was dead, and now even his body was gone from the empty tomb. Time to go home and back to the life they knew before Jesus. Time to forget.

The road to Emmaus is the way back for those who cannot move on, for those whose lives are stuck in the muck of misery that *their* expectations did not get met; or who choose security over risking new adventure. It's the road we all take at some point in our lives – maybe when we're young and we get left out of the popular group, or in middle age when we find that our jobs are not as satisfying as we planned, or as we fight the ravages of an aging body and mind, or are suddenly face to face with devastating illness or loss. We grieve, on this road to Emmaus. We grieve for what might have been.

But try as they might, the two disciples on this road couldn't forget Jesus. With each step, they remembered. Cleopas and maybe his companion was his wife, had such high hopes that Jesus was the Messiah, the one who would release Israel from cruel tyranny, and deliver them from world-weary discontent. The couple are remembering what he had said about loving one another, and those peculiar people he always ate with, and the lame and lepers who were healed. And as they talk, they notice over their shoulders that a man is walking with them, just listening. Then he asks them, "Tell me what you are discussing." They tell the story about Jesus. "We had so hoped that he was the One," they say, "but it was all a sham."

And then their companion tells them *his* story. "Do you remember the promises of the prophets, 'Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream'? Do you remember the covenant from God that

Moses brought down from the mountain, scratched in stone by God's finger? *You* are the children of a merciful God. Your Creator faithfully blesses you with steadfast love." The "gardener" is sowing memory seeds in their hearts, and when they reach the village, they beg him to stay.

"Stay with us. Come into the kitchen while I put on the kettle and slice some bread and cheese. Put your feet up. Make yourself at home. Can I get you a glass of wine?" And after passing the olives, and filling the cups, their companion takes the bread, gives a blessing of thanksgiving, breaks it and gives it to them.

Suddenly, they are stunned. Heart-throbbing, eye-tearing, goose-bump stunned! Their companion is Jesus! But, he vanishes just as they begin ask him questions and beg him to stay – clear into thin air. But they had seen him eat, so he wasn't a ghost. He had filled their hearts with fire, so it wasn't their imagination. Husband and wife look at one another and immediately run for the door. When you've seen Jesus, you can't stay put! They are raring to return to Jerusalem. Their hearts burn to see their friends again, and tell them about their companion.

The word "companion" comes from two Latin words: *cum* meaning "with" and *panis*, meaning "bread." A companion is one who will walk with us and listen to us, who will offer us wisdom, and share our life. But in order to see that companions are a gift of mercy, or hope, or love from God, it is necessary to break bread with them. It is necessary that *we* invite *them* into *our* home and into our lives to share *our* bread. It is necessary that we include them as family, not treat them as strangers or outsiders or just visitors. Companions – that's what disciples are, you and I. That's who we are called to be with *all* people we meet.

Cleopas and his wife are on the road *from* Emmaus to return to Jerusalem, leaving the crumbs of despair, disappointment, and heartbreak on the kitchen table. As they go, they again talk about Jesus: *Wouldn't it be grand to see him again? Maybe he'll come and walk with us on the road again. Look, ahead, there he is! There, the man with the staff. No, it's a crippled old man. Let's bring him with us. But wait, see – over there in the corner of that house? There*

he is, sitting with that child! No, it's a mother weeping with hunger. Let's bring them with us. Now I see him! In the marketplace in the middle of that crowd. No, it's a young boy left beaten by the mob. Let's bring him with us. Up to the upper room they all go – disciples and those whom they have invited to break bread. As they break the bread, they see in the mother the compassionate eyes of Jesus, in the crippled man the smile of Jesus and in the boy, Jesus' firm chin. The face of Jesus that his disciples had thought they had lost is found again.

As the years go on, other disciples re-tell the story of Jesus. These words of the disciples “cut the hearts” of the listeners open, and hearts that were broken are healed. “Repent. Turn back from despair. Be baptized and join us on the journey *back* from Emmaus. Remember Jesus, in the breaking of the bread. Keep moving, and seeking, and striving to follow Jesus.”

For our creative God is *always* on the move, revealing new hopes and promise. Author Bruce Epperly says, “Faithfulness is in the remembering, but also in movements that create *new* memories and *new* possibilities.” God calls us to come away from our self-centered needs and fears and disappointment to be companions – bread-sharing Easter people, invited to see new possibilities.

Think of each footstep we take everyday as a step into resurrection new life. Ask yourself, *what new thing is God calling us to in our congregation? What new thing are we doing in our lives to respond to God's call? Are we going to walk in despair toward Emmaus, or walk in hope away from Emmaus – as companions, sharing the road to new life?*