

Reframing the Story!

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER
THE REV. KATHLEEN D. R. HARKNESS

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
of Springfield Township,
in Bucks County, PA

2170 Route 212
Coopersburg, PA 18036
610-346-7282

Luke 24:13-35

When we get to a certain age, we find our vision begins to change. And when we get even older we need to have cataracts taken care of. That is true for a middle-aged man who wants to weep in frustration as the optometrist reminds him yet again that as we get older we cannot have the vision we had when we were younger. She explains, *"We can correct your vision with contacts so that you can see distances clearly. And then we can prescribe reading glasses for you to see close work.* Or we can compromise to let you see some distance and some close work with just contacts, using multifocal lenses and occasional glasses. But we cannot get a perfect set of contacts or glasses that will fit all situations for you. You will simply have to learn to use contacts and glasses together and adjust like everyone else at your age." *"But I can't see well with these contacts!"* he cried. *"And I can't stand taking the glasses on and off and then leaving them at the office and losing them at home."* *"Buy more glasses,"* she said. *"They're not very expensive."* He replied, *"That's not the point. I want to see what I want to see when I want to see it — without any of this bother of finding the right pair of glasses."*

Not only does our vision change the way we perceive the world; our faith journeys change over time. Even the four gospel writers recount the resurrection story through different lenses. They perceive and reframe the resurrection story differently even though the event is the same. Today's lesson from Luke makes the point that our perspective about the resurrection story can be reframed. Here we see two followers of Jesus--Cleopas and an unnamed disciple on a seven mile walk away from Jerusalem toward Emmaus.

Note the direction of their travel. Instead of north toward Galilee, they walk northwest to Emmaus. We don't know much about them. Had they been with Jesus? Had they journeyed with Jesus? Did they see it all? Did they hear his teachings? Did they witness his healings? Did they see the exorcisms, his walking on water, and the rising of the dead? What about the huge crowds. But then they saw the crucifixion. They had precious memories, but now they experienced the trauma of

his death and they are walking away from the community that went with him. As they sadly debate what they have witnessed, they are disappointed. *"They had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.* Their dreams are shattered. It speaks to any of us who have ever followed Jesus in community with others--the highs and lows, the good things and the struggles. Faith communities experience these things over time. Certainly, we at Trinity have!

While they are talking and discussing, Jesus shows up out of nowhere and joins them on their journey. But their eyes are kept from recognizing him. And yet he goes with them in their direction of travel. Isn't this just like Jesus when he walks with us and we walk away from him? He is still with us even though we don't recognize him.

There is a story by W.E.B. DuBois called, *"Jesus Christ in Texas."* The setting is Waco, Texas in the early twentieth century after a recent lynching. It is about a mysterious stranger who appears in a town and speaks about the Gospels in a compelling way. He meets with convicts and exchanges clothing with the needy. He meets with leading figures in the town at a dinner party who don't quite know what to make of him. He is not quite white; nor is he not quite black. Eventually he is lynched. Jesus in incognito!

When does Jesus come to us and wants to remain hidden from our sight? Why does he do this to these two disciples? Is it because he has something to teach them? Has Jesus ever taught you something when he remained hidden from your eyes? And later on you realize that he was there? Or when does Jesus come to us and we work very hard not to recognize him? Which is more likely for us: Jesus whom we hide from? Or Jesus who hides from us?

Jesus addresses Cleopas and the other disciple saying, *"What are you discussing as you walk along?"* Cleopas answers, *"Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have taken place?"* Jesus says, *"What things?"* It is now that the two travelers reveal what they think of the crucified Messiah. They thought him to be a prophet. They hoped he would redeem Israel. After all, Messiahs are victorious. They are political and military leaders who would liberate Israel from Roman oppression.

But this Messiah hasn't measured up from their point of view. They are wearing tainted lenses! They are heartbroken and disillusioned. They believe all hope is lost because Jesus was crucified rather than conquering the Romans. They simply can't understand how someone who is crucified could be a Messiah. Messiahs don't die. Messiahs are not crucified. Even their conversation about the Messiah is a dangerous, risky, and political one because the Romans would find it treasonous to discuss a change of leadership. Furthermore, they reveal their disappointment with their religious leaders who collaborate with the occupying power. And yet, Jesus still hidden to them walks with them, and engages with them. He travels with those who dare to speak openly of their political and religious concerns. It is now that the hidden Jesus begins to challenge their interpretation and reframe the story. He says to them, *"Oh, how foolish you are. How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Wasn't it necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things, die, and then enter into his glory?"* He reframes a different way of looking at the events of the past few days and introduces them to the idea of a crucified Messiah. He upends their way of interpreting scripture and points them to numerous ways scripture speaks of a suffering servant and the Messiah who was destined to suffer and die.

As they reach Emmaus, the two invite Jesus to stay with them. When he is at the table with them, he takes bread, blesses and breaks it. He gives to them and their eyes are opened. Jesus has been with for the entire journey and they didn't recognize him.

I think the same thing can be true of the body of people called the church. There are some people who are able to see God's work alive in the church. They are engaged. They want to help. And they support the leadership. And then there are others who only see the negative sides of things, things that don't appeal to them. They point out people who aren't as engaged in the ministry, without considering these people's personal circumstances. They lament that there are people who are no longer worshipping with them. They complain about the irrelevance of the sermons, the mistakes and flaws of the pastor without offering positive support. And yet, Jesus is prepared to walk the journey with them even when the journey is challenging. Even when the message isn't an older understanding the Bible, or a vision of God they once had. These things happen in many churches, especially today when the country is so polarized about everything.

But here's the thing. Jesus doesn't not give up on us. He journeys with us. Jesus offered numerous teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount, that we know he intended to be foundational teachings for his followers. They do not disillusion.

Perhaps what is needed is to look through another pair of lenses to see the beauty, the assets, the accomplishments, the joys. Perhaps what is needed is to leave the past behind and look toward the future and all we can be with Christ's help. Small churches can do big things! But it takes support and love for each other. It is the risen Jesus who lives who breathes the Holy Spirit on us, who is the center of our faith. Do you believe that?

We need to be ready to meet him, even in the most unexpected places and unexpected faces, such as the stranger in Du Bois story. As Margaret Aymer states in her commentary this week, *"Luke's story reminds us that our relationship with the resurrected Christ is a relationship of long walks, risky conversations, reframed traumas and quiet dinners, an intimate relationship between Christ and the church of words shared and bread broken."* Like the optometrist who worked with the

man who complained about his vision, we too may need to look through various lenses and discover how Jesus comes to us and reveals a new reframing of the story for us and our world.

In Jesus' name, amen.