

Sermon for Easter 3A
April 26, 2020

When I was a kid my grandfather had a trailer/cottage in Eagle Lake, PA. I had no idea where that was. All I knew was that summer meant a trip to the trailer in a place that was new and different and fun. Near the trailer was a small lake; I assume Eagle Lake...where my sister and I would splash and play on hot days. It's funny the tangible things that stick in my mind from that place. I remember bunk beds in the hallway of the trailer, which was something we didn't have at home. I think I fell out of the top bunk once or twice over the years. My grandfather had a little red golf cart to tool around the grounds of the trailer park. I used to love riding in it; bumping along in the back, legs dangling over the road; the sound and the smell of the gas engine are vivid in my mind. The deep red clay roads that clung to our shoes when it rained and stained the air with crimson dust when it was dry. The creek where I found a heart-shaped rock that my mom still has somewhere in her jewelry box. To us, who were used to the suburbs of New York City, this was so interesting and exciting. We saw animals we never saw on Long Island. I think Eagle Lake is where I learned what skunk smells like, and I remember watching little chipmunks running in and out under the deck. Still when I think of that place it means family. We were happy. And together.

Even now a smell or sound can bring me back to that time of happy memories when we were together. My grandparents are decades gone from us. And my family is scattered about the country. But the memory of Eagle Lake sticks with me as an embodiment of the communion we shared all those summers ago. It warms my heart now, even being so far removed from that time and place.

This week Luke takes us on a long walk on the road to Emmaus. 7 miles on foot over hills and rocky paths gives us a lot of time to think and ponder. To mull over and sit with all the emotions that hang heavy on the heart. It's where we meet these disciples Cleopas and his traveling companion. On this long road home from Jerusalem after the events of Jesus' crucifixion had taken place. And after the perplexing news the women shared when they got back from attempting to attend the dead -- That in fact there was no dead person there to tend. As Cleopas tells it, they were astounded by this story.

“Yes, and besides all this we had hoped that he would be the one to redeem Israel”

Emotionally that's where they are on that road – sad, perplexed, maybe even traumatized by what they had witnessed in Jerusalem. Acknowledging out loud the things they had hoped for that now seemed lost.

Physically they were going through the motions. Trying to put one foot in front of the other so they could return home before night fell.

This year the road to Easter is long. And it seems like we are stuck here on this road for a while. Without a clear end in sight. We have hints and glimmers of it up ahead, but there is still so much uncertainty.

When my grandmother used to pick us up to go to the trailer, I remember how long those car rides seemed to me as a small child. Three hours from LI to Eagle Lake is a long time on the road, even for adults. My sister and I wondered from the back seat more than a few times: “Are we there yet? When will we get there?”

It feels like that with Easter this year. When will we really get there? I mean, I know we celebrated already; sort of...But part of us is probably wondering

“What if we never arrive at Easter?”

We are on that road like the disciples, making lists of the things hoped for and now lost. Personally, I had hoped to visit my family in New York the week after Easter, but of course I had to cancel my flight. Projects and work plans have had to shift or be abandoned all together. In talking with some of you, I know weddings that have been moved, surgeries postponed, graduations and even summer camps cancelled. And deaths that have happened at which loved ones *had hoped* to be present but could not because of Covid-19.

Even small losses like the freedom to play with friends in the park or go out for drinks at our favorite bar can pile up.

I encourage you and your family to name your own things hoped for and lost along this pandemic road.

“Yes, and besides all this we had hoped...”

But I love this story of the Road to Emmaus because it is so rich in its promises and truths for people of faith. It is a resurrection story, but it is a subtle one. The risen Christ is not triumphant in glory with golden beams surrounding him. Instead he is the stranger that meets these sad and perplexed, losing-hope disciples right there on that long road. And he makes the arduous journey with them. One of the big questions that lingers is why they did not recognize Jesus. Speculation abounds as to the answer to that question. But it is powerfully human when we think about how our emotional overload can keep us from seeing clearly.

Maybe you have felt some of the challenge in processing things normally in this time when we are all a mixed-bag of emotions.

Even more so for our faith lives, this emotional time of so much loss can be like a shroud over our eyes, preventing us from seeing where God is present in our lives. At

last weeks' bible study Pr. Katy Grindberg shared something she had heard: "That belief happens only in hindsight."

Cleopas and his friend may have been too overcome by emotion to see Jesus on the road. But he became evident in the breaking of the bread. In a memory of tangible things that had taken place when they were together.

And it was only then that they looked back to the time spent on the road. And in looking back remembered how their hearts were burning inside them while Jesus walked with them.

So I'd like that propose that we can practice some proactive retrospective. That might have just been an oxymoron. But what if we practiced noticing the moments that get our hearts burning within us. Or maybe even just those moments that warm our hearts, if not set them aflame.

It might be a way that we could invite Easter's arrival in our own lives, even while we are still on this road. Like the disciples who finally invited the risen Christ into their home. A chance they nearly missed as he almost walked away into the night.

Maybe your heart has been warmed like mine by generous neighbors, who offer to buy groceries or think of you with a small token. Or by friends that have gotten back in touch after a long absence. Maybe hearing the stories of healthcare workers and other essential workers giving of themselves courageously has moved you. Like the risen Christ who surprises the disciples and vanishes before their eyes, it might only be a glimpse that we are given of blessings along the way. Small gestures. Unexpected graces. These are Easter too. Resurrection stories in the midst of this long slog.

The losses we experience in this time are real. And some are big.

We might be crying out in our frustration and sadness and confusion, “How much longer until we get there?”

But take heart because whether we can recognize it right now or not, the risen Christ goes with us. Walking alongside us on this long and arduous road.