

April 30, 2017      Easter 3

Luke 24: 13-35

Spring has finally sprung, I hope. The trees are flowering and so are our gardens. The toads are singing up a storm in our pond, and the allergies are coming on full blast. It's usually around this time of the year, that Vicki and I get the urge to hop into the car and just drive with no destination in particular. We just want to get away and experience wide open spaces: Road trips, a Canadian institution.

A week ago Thursday we took off for a workshop in Ottawa. Instead of taking the usual route of the 417, we drove along the old highway 17 for the first time. We were on a road trip, discovering towns and villages we didn't know existed. We saw the Ottawa River in high flood. We snaked through flood plains and skirted rock outcroppings. Even the weather seemed to improve as we drove. The journey became as important as our destination as we shared conversations, and explored new places. We really *enjoyed* it.

There is another kind of road trip we take when crisis or tragedy, or loss come our way. We need to leave town, get out of Dodge, to clear our mind, to sort out our priorities, to get a fresh perspective. We hit the road to see someone before it is too late or experience something before we can't anymore. This kind of road trip consciously or unconsciously seeks a lost security or missing *joy* through some sort of experience.

Today, we hear about this second kind of road trip, a road trip that struggles with crisis, tragedy and loss. What I'm talking about is the Emmaus road trip.

The walk to Emmaus is a painful yet **joyful** story. It is the story of how resurrection happens for most of us. Let's take note of some interesting aspects.

First of all, only one of the two individuals is introduced. Only Cleopas is named. Scholars are pretty clear that the other person, who is not mentioned, is a woman, who most likely is his wife. If there were two men they both would be named and both would be talking.

Now scholars don't suggest, but with a little active imagination I suggest today, that if it took most of the day or just all afternoon to walk seven miles, then the wife was probably in the family way and probably in a fairly advanced state. The 2 to 2 ½ hour trip continues all the way to sundown, around 6 pm. Right off, it looks to me that we have a family unit. We are all included in this story.

So, Luke's story has a couple, maybe in the family way, representing the larger community of followers of **Jesus**. They are leaving town disheartened and in despair, with vague stories of an empty tomb, which nobody understands. They seek refuge, a safe place away from the religious storm in Jerusalem.

Somehow along the way, as they share their dashed hopes and dreams with a stranger and reflect upon the Scripture tradition, things begin to change. Their hearts are strangely warmed. With the breaking of the bread by the stranger, they suddenly see the Risen One. They hit the road again, back to Jerusalem, empowered and *overjoyed* by resurrection possibilities.

Now, none of this transformation would have happened without the sharing on the road. The couple took a risk by sharing their hopes and dreams and despairs. The stranger could have ridiculed them or worse. But they had the courage to open their hearts and expose their vulnerability. Road trips have a way of encouraging this.

Listening to the stranger was quite a challenge and another act of vulnerability especially when his interpretation of the scripture was quite a stretch for the couple. A suffering Messiah was just not on the religious radar screen. What happened to **Jesus** sure didn't fill them with hope and expectation. But again, they were ready to listen, to **accept** the stranger's insights; they allowed him to change their minds about their own faith. They were able to let go of resignation and defeat and **accept** that what had happened to **Jesus** had saving significance.

As Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu tells us, "*The acceptance of reality is the only place from which change can begin.*" Later they remember how their hearts '**burned**

**within them'**, when the stranger interpreted the scripture. Their **acceptance** out on the road allowed resurrection **joy** to eventually enter in.

My walk to Emmaus happened the Summer I was 15. I was part of an ecumenical youth group started up for the summer in our lakeside village. It was led by the resident Anglican priest. He told us about his ill spent youth growing up, in down town Toronto, and my ideas about religion began to change. You didn't have to be a goody-goody to be a believer. And man I wasn't a goody-goody or I sure didn't want to be.

We held a swim-a-thon to raise money for The John Bosco Home for troubled teens in Toronto. We all swam the two miles across Kempenfelt Bay. A word to the wise, don't do the breaststroke the whole way. It's a killer on the lower back.

I don't remember how it happened, but that summer I started reading the New Testament three chapters a night before bed. Matthew's **Jesus** just jumped off the pages as I read each night. He was real. He was alive.

Somewhere in the middle of Matthew's Gospel I let this living **Jesus** into my heart and mind. I **accepted** him in the here and now as really real. It changed my life.

Now my family were good solid affluent United Church cultural Christians of the 1960's. We took church in moderation. We went to Sunday worship spring and fall. That is after the ski season ended and before cottage season began, and right after the cottage season ended and before the ski season started.

I don't know how many Sunday it added up to, but I do know as a kid growing up, I never got close to earning one of those fancy gold perfect attendance pin in Sunday school. No, not even close! I got the green tin one for just showing up once and a while.

So, we were not part of the inner circle of disciple that first Easter, or any other Easter. We were a family out on the road trip to Emmaus. But a stranger caught up to us out there and I listened and learned and my heart was strangely warmed.

At the end of summer our youth group conducted a community **boat-in** worship service at the government dock. As we studied and prepared the stranger became more

than a friend to me. Then a sacred moment in the outdoor service brought me into resurrection *joy*. I was raised up and led back to Jerusalem and the community of believers. I've been there ever since. It's funny how accepting **Jesus** as really real connects us to *joy*.

*Application for Today*

When did the resurrection first happen for you?

When did the *allowing love* of **Jesus** get to you, come alive in you, and turn your life toward *joy*?