

“One Thing Leads to Another”
Easter 3a
Luke 24:13-35

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Grace Lutheran Church
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In Jesus' Name.

According to the church year calendar this is the third Sunday of Easter. According to the calendar that orders the bulk of our days it is May 8, 2011. And according to the calendar set by the greeting card companies, the floral industry, and the purveyors of Sunday brunch this is Mothers' Day. Happy Mothers' Day to all of you who nurture our children. On this third Sunday of Easter I acknowledge that one of the things mothers want to do on this day is go to church with the family. It is a matter of hospitality. While mom does not want to cook, do dishes, or clean the house on this day her instincts for hospitality are evident in wanting to gather people in.

We see such hospitality unfold on the road to Emmaus. Cleopas and his companion were deep in conversation about all the things that had happened in Jerusalem. Luke says their eyes were kept from recognizing Jesus when he came near. As far as they were concerned it was a stranger they welcomed into their company and their conversation. One thing led to another and soon enough the stranger not only entered into their conversation he commandeered it. He called them foolish and slow of heart to believe. I think it was a tremendous display of hospitality on their part that they did not turn the stranger away from them. Rather, they leaned in close to listen to him interpret to them all the things about himself in all the scriptures beginning with Moses and all the prophets. One thing led to another. They came to Emmaus. Jesus walked ahead as if going on. They urged him saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” They invited him to dinner “so Cleopas' companion must have been his wife, don't you think?, said one woman in our Bible class last Wednesday. “A man would never think to do that,” she added. Jesus accepted their hospitality and joined them at the dinner table. One

thing led to another and Jesus assumed the role of host. Their hospitality was wide enough to accept his presumption to sit at the head of the table. As we witnessed at the feeding of the 5,000 and at the Passover before his crucifixion, Jesus took the bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them.” Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. This is a not so subtle message that we recognize him in the Lord’s Supper. They have heard the Word and shared in the Supper and as one thing leads inevitably to another they witnessed to what they have seen and heard. They hurried back to Jerusalem to the eleven and their companions and they all witnessed to one another.

There is more than one layer in this course of one thing leading to another. Today’s gospel reading is a recognition story. We had a recognition story last week as well. They recognized Jesus by the wounds in his hands and side. Mary Magdalene recognized Jesus when he called her by name. Today it is in the breaking of the bread. These things are what Luther called the identifying marks of the church. We add up these milestones along the way: Jesus’ suffering, the Word, Holy Baptism where God calls us by name, the Lord’s Supper, worship, and witness, also known as ministry.

There is something missing, which is perhaps why it is a lovely story to this point but it hardly gets to the heart of the matter as far as our lives are concerned. Cleopas and his companion said their hearts burned within them as Jesus opened to them the scriptures. In the first reading Peter’s sermon cut them to the heart, so much so that three thousand were baptized that day. It took us two hours last Sunday to confirm twenty-five. Even if lines formed behind all eleven apostles, their companions, and Mr. and Mrs. Cleopas this service went on all day. Peter told them, “Repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Here is the missing piece. Confession and absolution

cut to the heart of the matter for us. Jesus' death and resurrection are for us. And if so, the cut into the heart makes way for the Holy Spirit to enter. We become the habitation of the Holy Spirit. A fifteenth century text, in a setting by Ralph Vaughn Williams, always cuts me to the heart. It is hymn 508 in the Lutheran Book of Worship.

Come Down, O Love Divine;
 Seek thou, this soul of mine
 And visit it with thine own ardor glowing;
 O Comforter, draw near;
 Within my heart appear
 And kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

Oh, let it freely burn,
 Till worldly passions turn
 To dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
 And let thy glorious light
 Shine ever on my sight,
 And clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

And so the yearning strong,
 With which the soul will long,
 Shall far outpass the power of human telling;
 No soul can guess his grace
 Till it become the place
 Wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.

Perhaps Peter had discovered a thing or two about the consequences for housing the Holy Spirit by the time he wrote his letter, our second reading today. He says it makes us exiles. One thing leading to another, exile is where the Holy Spirit takes us. T.S. Eliot ended his poem, "Journey of the Magi," "We returned to our places, these Kingdoms, But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation, With an alien people clutching their gods...."

A friend in a former congregation told me of standing one Monday morning in a circle of co-workers who were spending their break-time talking about how late they slept in the day before. He was silent until someone turned the attention to him, "How about you?" My friend

told them he didn't sleep in; he got up for church. They all laughed. One woman chortled, "Get a life." He was an exile in his own workplace. May that be as difficult as our exile becomes.

Nigerian writer, Uwem Akpan, began one of his stories like this, "I'm nine years and seven months old. I'm at home playing peek-a-boo in my room with my little brother, Jean. It's Saturday evening, and the sun has fallen behind the hills. There's silence outside our bungalow, but from time to time the evening wind carries a shout to us. Our parents have kept us indoor since yesterday" ("My Parents' Bedroom). The shouts grew louder until they filled the bungalow with murderous rage.

This little girl, the nine year old narrator of the story, thinks her home has become inhabited by ghosts. She thinks she hears the house breath. She hears moans and movement coming from above the ceiling. It is not her imagination. Her parents have hidden seven of their neighbors in the attic. They belonged to the ethnic group murderous gangs were intent on eliminating from their country. Almost one million people died over a few weeks time in Rwanda in 1994.¹ That act of hospitality made her parents exiles in their own land.

If we provide hospitality for the Holy Spirit, the Spirit leads us into exile. And as one thing leads to another the Holy Spirit always leads us home to God.

¹ <http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/education/rwandan-timeline>

Between 800,000 and 1,071,000 Tutsis, and including some moderate Hutus, were murdered. Many more were mutilated, maimed or physically scarred for life. The mental anguish and the trauma cannot be measured. A steady number of people have been convicted in the International Court of Justice; those Tutsis who returned have been encouraged to assist in the 'closure' process of Rwanda through local hearings or 'grass courts'(gachacha).