

Acts 9:1-10a, 17-19  
Psalm 34:2-4;5-6;9 R: *I will bless God all ways.*  
Hebrews 11:1-3  
Luke 24:13-35

**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem**  
**April 11, 2010 Second Sunday in Easter**

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The Walk to Emmaus: Whether this is the first time you have heard this story or the hundredth, there are so many curiosities in it, so many questions left unanswered, leaving us to wonder ...

We wonder who the “other” disciple is with Cleopas... Why not mentioned by name? Was it the author of this Gospel, Alfred-Hitchcock-like appearing as a shadow in it? Was it the wife of Cleopas? Or both? Is it us, the listeners, and our invitation and entry into the story - those of us going on *our way*?

We wonder about Emmaus... Emmaus is never mentioned before. What was in the town of Emmaus for these disciples? Did Emmaus hold hope or consolation for grieving disciples with dashed hopes?

We wonder why the disciples couldn't recognize Jesus... Was it like when you sit on a plane and chat with someone the whole way but never get a good look at their face till you get up to go your separate ways and vanish? But Jesus was no stranger, these disciples knew him, they knew his voice... We wonder.

We wonder about the nature of this resurrected being, this new Jesus, this ninja presence, this vanishing act, popping in and out - "who was that masked man anyway?" We wonder about this meeting, this curious experience of Jesus' resurrection "body".

We wonder about the number of disciples here... The "Eleven" are mentioned [twelve minus Judas], but the number seems only symbolically important, since the larger assembly of all the disciples is the more important company and community here. Perhaps like the twelve tribes of Israel which always seem to be shifting in name [if you read the Hebrew Scriptures, you may find yourself asking: which 12 tribes?]. Or like the twelve disciples that aren't completely agreed upon in name throughout the Gospels [which 12?]. Is this number more meaningful as symbol than fact?

We may even wonder why these two have left Jerusalem while the rest stayed.

But what is usually less wondered about is why, when their eyes were opened, and they came to know Jesus in the breaking of the bread, these two travelers immediately get up and go back to Jerusalem.

On one level, it seems the obvious and easiest question to answer: The other disciples were there – the "eleven" AND the whole company of disciples. And so our two travelers simply returned to share the **good news**. But answers are rarely that simple.

This return to Jerusalem really is a wonder, for we know that at the end of the Gospel of Mark, the disciples are sent out to Galilee where they will find Jesus, in Galilee, not Jerusalem. At the end of Matthew, the disciples are sent to a different mountain again in Galilee, not Mount Zion, not in Jerusalem, but to a new mountaintop; and it is not in Jerusalem, but in Galilee... and it is there they are to meet Jesus, not in Jerusalem. But in Luke, the two disciples go back to Jerusalem, where the other disciples remain, in Jerusalem. And Jesus will come to the disciples in Jerusalem. You get the repeated point: A return to Jerusalem is important for Luke.

And so, what is the importance of this place for Luke? "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem": It is a place of lament, disaster, grief, abuse, destruction, fear, and political hypocrisy and unrest, – "a place that kills prophets and stones those sent to it." Luke's own words. Why would you want to go back? Why would Luke want the disciples and the listeners of his Gospel, to go back? Why would they go against the flow back to the place of persecution, prosecution, execution... not only for Jesus, but also potentially for themselves? And as history unfolds, it would indeed be for them too.

For in the book of Acts, we learn that Jerusalem became a place for the persecution and prosecution of those followers of "the Way", those followers of Christ. We know that Saul [Saul and Paul are the same person - we are never told exactly why there is this name change. Although we have certain ideas about it, it is never explained, - we are left to wonder. But Saul and Paul are the same person]. We know that Saul before his conversion, was rounding up Christ-followers, forcing synagogues to release their files on them, and taking them to Jerusalem to be prosecuted – all those along the "Way," both women and men. A radically inclusive witch-hunt.

We also learn that Paul himself, after his own conversion, didn't return to Jerusalem for three years, and then again only returned 14 years later, and even then only stayed low-key with James and Peter for a brief period of time – perhaps in some underground fashion. Saul has a vision of Christ and does not hasten ever return to Jerusalem. And yet in the reading from Luke, these two travelers along the way also have a vision of Christ, and then **go to** Jerusalem. It is clear that Luke was calling his current community back to Jerusalem, to go against the flow, to swim upstream, not to flee. One of the symbols for the early Christians was a fish, but it's a wonder to me that it wasn't more specifically, at least for Luke, salmon: Swim fearlessly to the place you were spawned, to your home, to your death?

Because, you see, Jesus never intended on creating a new place of worship, a new faith, a new religion, a new "Temple", which we now call, "Church", and which we now call in his anointed name, "Christianity". In Luke we learn that Jesus wanted to restore the Judean prophetic tradition of justice, call Temple leaders to accountability, and renew a faith whose institution had lost its bearings. Sound familiar? Similarly, the first followers of Christ never wanted to part from Judaism, and in their eyes, nor did they – and for about 40 years or so after Jesus died, they were more or less successful. But tensions mount. Rigidity sets in. Party lines

are drawn in the sand, and a child's game becomes the stuff of national and religious enmity: "Red rover red rover, send Jesus right over?" Will you be circumcised or not? Will you obey the Sabbath? Will you allow women to speak in church or not? [Note that we deal with this same issue 2000 years on!] Will you go to war with Rome, or not; are you in or out? The gauntlet was thrown down, and divisiveness ruled, Jesus' own body torn apart. And so, each faction claimed to be the true "Judean" – the true keepers of the faith and tradition. None, not one, wanted to be a splinter group, they all claimed the one faith. But those with power tend to win out.

But for Luke, Jerusalem was the place where the long hoped-for unity could be made real, - it could become the central post of an all encompassing but free flowing and wide-spread canopy - a large, inclusive tent, with a solid center. But history plays out and those who followed Christ did not get to keep Jerusalem, as Luke had hoped, - they ended up flourishing in house "assemblies" [which is the word for church]. And neither did the Judeans who did not believe that Jesus held the true "Way", get to keep Jerusalem, they too were scattered, forced to reassemble and make their way elsewhere. While people do leave institutions, claiming them failed and unsalvageable, it is far more often the case that institutions fail their people, or fall, leaving the people to pick up the broken pieces and gather again.

At the time that Luke wrote, the early church attempted to keep its fealty to Jerusalem and to its authorities in the person of Peter while living out the old traditions in a new way in community abroad. The irony is that Peter failed: Peter wanted to remain Judean with its heart center in Jerusalem, but that did not happen. Paul, with his mission to the world and to the hearts and needs of people, succeeded. Living as Christ lived out the faith was every person's right, man and woman, throughout the world, Jerusalem or not: The reign of God would crop up throughout the world, de-centralized, visible in people, invisible in its seeding.

And then later, under Constantine, Rome would take the followers of Christ under its wing where "Jerusalem" had spurned them, - where Luke had wanted and hoped to gather them. But Rome even splintered away from the essence of the early Christian faith, making a powerful empire out of a faith that was meant to serve the least powerful among us: Later the persecuted would become the persecutors.

Fast forward several centuries, there was an East/West split, Rome in the West and Constantinople in the East. Both following and failing its people, they decided to force a schism that created the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Church - each bereft of the other's rich gifts.

Fast forward again several centuries, and Rome failed its Reformers, who at the forefront were Luther and Calvin, and who, like Jesus, really had nothing new to say, but only reiterated the theology of the very same founders of faith that the Catholic Church held to. And so they did not call themselves schismatic, but rather the one true faith. But Rome did not agree with a new locus of power among the faithful, and like the early followers of Christ needing to flee Jerusalem, the Reformers found asylum in smaller groups of like-minded individuals and sympathetic Catholic churches: they did not want to part with the Church, but found the authorities of Rome wanting, to say the least. And the history of the West is that the

Reformation, like a badly cut branch, would produce a hundred shoots where just one vine was ever wanted.

From Jerusalem to Rome to Constantinople to Gutenberg and its various protestant growths, the Church has a splintered history, a schismatic history. Weren't we all, in the first place, desiring to be One? Wasn't Luke trying to rejoin us all in Jerusalem?

And so *we* go back to our Gospel story. Luke has disciples going back to Jerusalem into the fire, just like we go back to Rome. We go back there, hoping to roll away its stone, to be the true resurrected Church that will still stand when its walls come tumbling down. We will be a gathering up of all those who have been *left* aside in its wake. But if we go to Rome, mustn't we also go also to the Eastern Church, and resurrect our unity? And then also mustn't we go to the early churches and resurrect their searching spirit for right, communal living with all - which I believe we do here. And if we go to the early Church, mustn't we then also go to Jerusalem, reaching out to our Jewish forebears? And if we go to Jerusalem, mustn't we also recognize those who claim that mountain now, our Muslim sisters and brothers. If we go back far enough, as we must if we seek to reach as far into the future, we may find ourselves not in any city, but in a garden - that first garden that precedes any Jerusalem or Rome, "clinging" to each other, as the first humans "clung" to each other, for life; for companionship; for living for each other in the many names of the One God; to mind and care for all created things, all creatures, all creation - this is the best of Rome, this is the best of Jerusalem, this is the best: If we all whirled together without end - this is resurrection hope.

To this wondrous hope, we return, against the flow, against history's testimony, to our single source. And I wonder what that story of a return home would look like? I imagine, I hope, it would look like sitting down at table, all of us, and all of a sudden recognizing, looking across the table, that the hope for our future is in our midst, only to vanish, only for us who remain to go and make it real. Alleluia. Amen.