

6th Sunday of Easter (Year B)

Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

"The rising of the sun had made everything look so different-all colors and shadows were changed-that for a moment they didn't see the important thing. Then they did. The Stone Table was broken into two pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end; and there was no Aslan.

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried the two girls, rushing back to the Table.

"Oh, it's too bad," sobbed Lucy; "they might have left the body alone."

"Who's done it?" cried Susan. "What does it mean? Is it more magic?"

"Yes!" said a great voice behind their backs. "It is more magic." They looked round. There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself.

Recognizing Christ is no simple task. Perhaps C.S. Lewis knew this well for he spent a large part of his life an atheist. Always the intellectual, Lewis used to describe this phase as a time when he was “very angry with God for not existing.” I believe that he knew that recognizing the Risen Christ is tricky business even when you think you know what it is that you are looking for.

In his beautiful allegory for Christ, the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, Lewis describes the death of Aslan the Lion, that great Messianic savior of his book. The young Susan and Lucy, who have followed him until this point, watch in horror as Aslan willingly gives himself as a ransom for them and all who we have met so far in the story, Lucy and Susan’s brothers Edmund and Peter, the faun Mr. Tumnus, Mr. and Ms. Beaver, the Giant Rumblebuffin, and perhaps even those in the army of the White Witch herself.

Susan and Lucy watch as Aslan is bound and dragged to the stone table that has been prepared for his gruesome death. Aslan is humiliated as his grand and proud mane is cruelly shaved from his flesh as the White Witch and her ghouls laugh. Watching from a hidden place, the youngest sibling, Lucy, looks to Aslan’s face in this moment and notices that “the shorn face of Aslan looked to her braver, and more beautiful, and more patient than ever.”

And then, with her silhouette cast against the moonlight, the Witch raises her arms with the strange and evil knife and plunges it into Aslan’s flesh and Aslan dies.

Lucy and Susan stay with the body after the White Witch and her army march off to war now that the great Aslan has been defeated.

But then it happens. The morning comes and Susan and Lucy notice that the “rising of the sun made everything look different – all the colors and shadows were changed...” That sunrise of that Easter morning was so blinding that they don’t see what C.S. Lewis so eloquently calls “the important thing.” Upon hearing his voice, they turn around and barely recognize Aslan for his mane has miraculously grown back but he seems different, larger than life, alive and yet mysteriously something that we hadn’t seen before. After defeating the armies of the White Witch and crowning Lucy, Susan, Edmund, and Peter as Queens and Kings of Narnia, Aslan quietly slips away only to reappear throughout the Lewis’ larger Chronicles of Narnia.

The Resurrection often leaves us with more questions than it does answers. Perhaps like Susan and Lucy, we are left blinking on that Easter morn, our eyes adjusting to the brilliant light, asking “who’s done it....what does it mean?” Clearly the eyes of the followers on the road to Emmaus were still adjusting to the light for they do not recognize the Risen Christ. They, for a moment, do not see the important thing. Jesus, though, apparently seizes the moment and decides to have a little fun.

“No, I don’t know what has happened. We have a long walk; why don’t you tell me all about it?”

After the long walk, they urge him saying “stay with us!” Jesus obliges and then does a curious thing:

They gather for dinner and he breaks bread. In a familiar action, Jesus’s fingers wrap themselves around the loaf and break it in half.

And then they see the important thing.

Their eyes were opened and they recognized him.

And then he vanishes.

The bread quite literally falls into our hands as the One whom we now recognize disappears. Slips away. Just when we think we have this resurrection thing down, just when our eyes adjust to the light, just when we see the important thing, that thing vanishes. Why?

I don't know exactly what the Resurrected Christ looks like. But I have seen him and I will see him because his vanishing only draws me in deeper. Make no mistake, Christ is Risen, he is risen indeed. But he is on the loose, no longer confined to a cold stone table or a lonely tomb. No longer restrained to one image or one place, he is on the loose. The Risen Christ is made known to us in the breaking of the bread not so much because we recognize him as we did before, but rather because we taste and see a glimpse of what Christ is now capable of. Christ vanishes, slips away, to remind not that he has abandoned us, but rather, quite the opposite. He vanishes to show us that he is out and about. Christ leaves us wanting more because the Resurrected Christ looks different.

You know, this island looks different. When Tricia and I left this island just a few weeks ago, it was still looking pretty barren. Yes, the snow had finally receded, but still no where was a flower to be seen or a bush or tree to regain its former beauty. And yet, when Tricia and I returned to the Island a few days ago with a combination of jet lag and exhaustion from carrying a rather heavy amount of wine and olive oil back from Italy, we found that the Island again had color. All the sudden we were seeing deeper greens, and yellow, and red, and pink! Colors that we hadn't seen on Shelter Island since October!

While we were gone on our honeymoon, the Island seemed to have received a great breath of fresh air not unlike the breath Aslan gives to the creatures that the White Which had turned to stone.

Yes, resurrection is all around us but there are still places where it may be harder to see than others.

Loved ones have died.

Cops have been shot in the head in their cars.

African American men and women are profiled for their race on a daily basis.

Family members slip into generational patterns of alcoholism and substance abuse.

Those we love get sick and their bodies and minds deteriorate.

The need for resurrection surrounds us like the water that circles this island.

Now, at the beginning of this sermon writing process, my thesis was going to be that we have absolutely no idea where Christ will be next when he disappears from before our eyes. However, I have since completely reversed my position. I believe we now know *exactly* where the Resurrected Christ will appear next. He has left to be with those who I just mentioned - those who have experienced death. Those who experience injustice and unjust vengeance. Those who suffer from addiction. Those who feel helpless and lost and lonely. *That's* where the Risen Christ has gone!

Christ's revelation and subsequent disappearance is not cause for panic but for hopeful anticipation because the resurrected Christ is now free to go to everyone who needs resurrection promise and nothing can stop him.

So the question remains, when we see Christ, when bread is broken and the cup is poured and we see "the important thing" and Christ vanishes, we cannot use ignorance as an excuse for we know exactly where he has gone. He has gone to where we are called to be.

And so, as you go about your lives on this Island and off of it, in the week to come, take a minute - just one minute - and stop what you are doing and give thanks to God for a part of your life that is experiencing renewal. For some of us that might be easier to find than others. But when you do find that little piece of resurrection, go and share it with someone who needs it. And there, *there* I give you my word, you *will* find the Resurrected Christ!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.