

Luke 24:13-32 “3 Days”

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Our 2nd reading is taken from the gospel according to Luke. Our story today begins with 2 followers of Jesus--Cleopas & his companion who is perhaps his wife. We're not really sure who it is. The timeframe is right after the women have told the disciples that Jesus had risen. The disciples, however, hadn't believed the women.

Listen for the Word of God:

Please pray with me:

First of all I want to say thank you. Thank you for welcoming me and my family into this wonderful community of faith. We have been warmly embraced by you as a congregation, staff, session. I also have a confession to make. I am terrible at remembering names. I'll remember your face, and what you share with me—but even 3 months from now I'll probably forget your name. So I totally support the wearing of name tags.

I started as interim assoc. pastor 2 weeks ago, but my family actually came in Nov. We adopted HPPC as our church home. Our boys, Ian & Philip have joined in the youth and children's ministries. Many of you know that we are actually returning to Spokane. Scott & I were ordained at and served FPC years ago. We came back for Scott to answer God's call to be the organizing pastor of LV and now we've discovered that God had call for me too—to be your interim pastor

The interim is a time between installed pastors. At HPPC it's the time between Robin & whomever you will call as next installed assoc. pastor. The interim is a time of transition and transitions are hard. Just ask our son who had to move during his freshman year of high school. I've also realized how hard transitions are during the long winter here! Transitions are hard for congregations as well. Just ask the congregation in Philly that we formed & left. There are many feelings: pain, confusion, disappointment, fear, feeling lost, and grief. As the psalmist says in our passage this morning, the people were hungry and thirsty and wandering. But there are other feelings in transition: excitement over new opportunities, exploring new areas, meeting new friends and reacquainting with old friends. We often speak of faith as a journey. In a journey there are many transitions along the way. Our story today is on the road to Emmaus.

Henri Nouwen has a wonderful meditation on the Eucharistic life entitled "With Burning Hearts". In it Nouwen recounts our passage...

Two people are walking together. You can see from the way they walk that they are not happy. Their bodies are bent over, their faces are downcast, their movements slow. They do not look at each other. Once in a while they utter a word, but their words are not directed to each other. They vanish in the air as useless sounds. Although they follow the path on which they walk, they seem to have no goal. They return to their home, but their home is no longer home. They simply

have no other place to go. Home has become emptiness, disillusionment, despair.

They can hardly imagine that it was only a few years ago when they had met someone who had changed their lives, someone who had radically interrupted their daily routines and had brought a new vitality to every part of their existence. They had left their village, followed that stranger and his friends, and discovered a whole new reality hidden behind the veil of their ordinary activities—a reality in which forgiveness, healing, and love were no longer mere words but powers touching the very core of their humanity. The stranger from Nazareth had made everything new.

Now he is dead.

I can't imagine their sense of loss. I've never experienced that level of grief. Jesus' death was more than the loss of someone incredibly dear it was more even than the loss of a soul-mate. For the followers of Jesus their reason for living had been given and taken. Everything had changed!

That change threw them into a time of transition. What they thought would happen didn't happen. WE HAD HOPED....the disciple said. But Jesus wasn't the Messiah who would overturn the Roman government and redeem Israel. Their hopes for a political victory were utterly defeated. Jesus was gone.

As a community of faith we have our plans for how things will go with the church. After all, we do have sessions. And then we get the letter. We find out that God has other plans. That God has called our beloved associate pastor away from us and we are sad. We grieve the loss of a dear leader, confidante, teacher. We are thrown into a time of transition. For the disciples the transition time was 3 days. For churches the interim is usually a matter of months or a year or so.

It's hard to understand why it takes so long to get a new pastor. I'll share with you two typical reactions to the interim process. One was from a woman who had been raised Roman Catholic. When she heard that her pastor was leaving she was shocked. Her perspective was that the pastor would stay forever like a priest would—that quote “we would either bury him or he would bury us!” She then asked if the bishop or whatever you call the “presbytery bishop guy” would be assigning a new pastor the week after their pastor left.

Another reaction I'll call the corporate response. Roger Nicholson tells a vignette that exemplifies this common view. “The five members of the executive committee of 1st Church listened quietly to my presentation about the long process they were beginning now that their pastor of 26 years was retiring. I had been invited to come and advise them about what to do to obtain a new pastor. I sensed their impatience and discomfort as I detailed the process which could require several months if not a year or longer.

“That’s ridiculous!” said a young executive of a local corporation. “My company would have a replacement in six weeks. We should just get out there and hire someone immediately. Let’s not waste time.”

So what’s the point of the interim? Why not get thru the transition and get on with the ministry as soon as possible? Nicholson’s answer to this question is this, “As the congregation begins to take stock of itself, to assess its strengths and weaknesses, and to refocus its sense of identity and mission, new understanding of the past emerges, along with an increasing readiness to move forward in new ways with a new leader.” You see transition times are critical moments of ministry—they are pivot times, times of renewal, times to make a turn. Bottom line—you need time to appreciate where you’ve been, enjoy where you are, and anticipate where you’re going.

Let’s go back to our story in Luke. The 2 followers are grieving. Man comes along. He is a stranger to them. Cleopas and his companion don’t know who he is. The text says that their eyes were kept from recognizing him. They tell him the story—he listens. They tell him all the things that had happened—how they were confused. The stranger agrees that they’re confused. In fact he calls them foolish, thick-headed, slow-hearted. The candor is kind of startling. After they tell their story—the stranger tells them a story. He shares about Moses & the prophets and interprets the scriptures for them. He tells them the story of God’s covenant relationship with the people Israel.

Jehovah had delivered the people. God was their protector and shield. God would deliver them again.

In the breaking of the bread their eyes are opened and they see Jesus. They get it. What they had hoped for had happened. Jesus had redeemed Israel. Jesus was raised. There was cause for joy for there was new life. The disciples were transformed.

In the Emmaus story we see the flow of change to transition to transformation--death, three days, and resurrection. The process is not unlike that at HPPC. We have change—Pastor Robin has left. We have transition with the interim beginning. And in time we will have transformation when the installed associate pastor comes. Note I didn't say permanent pastor—we all know that it is not permanent and pastors are called elsewhere. But God is permanent and God's steadfast love endures forever.

Right now we're in the 3 days—the time of transition. The first task of the interim period is to come to terms with history. It's a time to say good-bye, to celebrate ministry together. It's a time to reminisce about stories both recent and long ago--to remember pastors and how they influenced the present life of the church—to recall times of elation and times of difficulty.

We are closing a significant chapter in HPPC's story and opening the next chapter. And through it all Jesus seen and unseen is walking with us. Amen.

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