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“Being Honest”

Luke 24:13-35

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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?"

"What things?"

"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."

"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.

Luke 24:13-35

Let's be honest: that Easter stuff three weeks ago—the butterflies and beautiful clothes, the candy in the playground and the big lunch after church—is great, and God's miraculous truth that life beats death is totally worth celebrating. In fact, it makes us who we are. But somewhere, in the back of our minds, we can't quite make

sense of it. It's okay to admit we are skeptical that love is indeed that powerful.

Maybe it would help if we saw the miracles with our own eyes. Maybe then we would believe Jesus actually walked on water or healed all those people. But we're just hearing all of this second-, third-, fourth-hand. It sounds great, but what difference does it make for our lives?

Pastor-turned-professor/author Barbara Brown Taylor tells a story about friends she had gone to visit during a really awful season with cancer. She heard her sick friend's spouse pleading with God to do something. She eventually asks him about his prayers, wondering if he really believes it.

He said, "Honestly, I don't think it through, not now. I tell God what I want. I'm not smart enough or strong enough to do anything else, and besides there's no time. So I tell God what I want and I trust God to sort it out. "

Being human is super hard. Cancer, death, poverty, relationships, climate change all make it harder. Somedays we don't know if we trust God at all. Somedays we don't have a choice but to trust God.

And if we're honest, church can be painful too. We want it to be a place where being human is easier. But even though we practice forgiveness, people still get mean. We try to be kind and generous, but it feels like politics get in the way. We care more about the website than taking care of hungry people. We're hurt when we share honestly, but instead of feeling seen, we feel judged. The

church has pushed women out of leadership, told gay and transgender people they don't belong, and justified slavery. Gandhi even said, "I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ. "

You and I know that being Christian does not mean we are safe from the hard stuff of life. But when Christ followers inevitably hurt us, we become disillusioned that Christianity is worth something. Honestly, we see that the ruthless ones still win, Christian or not. So protecting ourselves and not showing our heartbreak is clearly the way to survive.

We put our heads down. We see only what we need to. We don't have time to see more. We walk through life doing what works and avoiding being honest and vulnerable. Our disillusionment clouds our minds so much so that we check out, and sometimes we can't even remember how we got from one place to the next. Along the way we hurt others and don't notice, we dig ourselves into a rut of selfishness and callousness, and we miss the holy magic waiting for us to notice.

But even when we don't believe it, even when we're hurt, even when we feel like we're too far away to see the thing the stories point to, faith is about showing up for the journey, nonetheless. We come honestly and do our best to follow Jesus' example so our hearts can open.

And in this story, Cleopas and the other guy almost miss the holy magic present with them. It's later in the day

on Easter, after the women went to the tomb and found it empty. Their whole world has turned upside down. They're walking, leaving the place where they thought there was hope. Their walk becomes a physical relief. They left Jerusalem several miles ago, having experienced so much fear and confusion there in the last three days. It's time to move on, they suppose, to figure out what in the world they are supposed to do now. They were so excited, they could taste the new world Jesus preached about, and now it feels like all of that is gone. What are they supposed to do now?

Then this guy comes along, with an annoying lightness in his step, and asks them, "What's up?" Geez, they think. Has he been living under a rock? So they take a sighing breath and start in on the story. What happened is all they can think about. And talking about it helps some, so they ride a wave of transparency.

"We really thought he was going to be the one to redeem Israel," they tell him.

They were ready for an apocalypse. Not the zombie version with grenades, but the literal meaning of the Greek word: a revelation, an awakening, a turning of the world order—where the meek inherit the earth. They're starved for exactly what Jesus preached—bad news come alive for the ruthless and good, relieving news for the oppressed.

"Well," Jesus replies, "Didn't all that have to happen?"

No, we don't need Jesus to die to save us or to pay some debt that humanity has racked up. Jesus suffers

because we suffer. When Jesus dies, he shows us that God chooses love even when it means pain for themselves. And, honestly, he suffers and dies because he made a lot of people angry. He saw injustice and named it and acted on it. He was teaching us to see too. And the people in power were threatened by all the waking up that was going on, so they killed him. Ultimately, suffering is part of the redemption, not because it's ordained by God, but because it forces us to wake up.

Following Christ does not protect us from suffering. We are called to be faithful to our human experience just as Jesus was, all the way through the pain.

One of my friends named Paula says that forgiveness is sometimes hard for her. So instead of praying to forgive, she prays for the desire to forgive.

When we're hurting, we hope to be like Jesus and still choose love, or to at least start with gratitude until we can choose love. But what Jesus does promise us is that God does not abandon us in our suffering. In fact, God is working in our muck to make us whole again, to bring new, good opportunity for us.

Maybe that's why they can't recognize Jesus. It could be that being raised from the dead just makes him look different. Maybe he's a little moist around the edges or he's shining. Or maybe they're forgetting that God is bigger than death. Maybe they just can't see the bigger truth. They've put their heads down, and they're moving on.

Isn't this what the whole narrative of the Bible, the whole story of Yahweh is about? It's love in the end. Story

after story tells this essential life after death pattern that is God's: Noah, Joseph, the Israelites freed from slavery, Ruth, Jonah, Lazarus, Jesus, Paul. This pattern of life and death and life is even written into the DNA of nature too. In case we forget who our creator is and the truth of life, all we have to do is look at the plants around us. When it feels like death, we can remember the tomb. Because the truth is life is persistently coming.

It's getting late as they make it to Emmaus. So they invite their travel companion to stay with them, practicing that beautiful Christian hospitality they were taught. They sit down to dinner, all starving after that 7-mile walk. And that's when it happens. Maybe it has something to do with all the stories from the scriptures filling their minds, or the practice of welcoming in a stranger, or maybe it was the warmth of the meal and the smell of the fresh bread. But whatever it was, suddenly they realize they've been in Jesus' company all day, and they had no idea.

Jesus takes the bread and breaks it. Immediately, a flood of memories rushes in. The voice and the words, their posture, even the texture of the table, all trigger images of Jesus feeding them. And their joy and relief rise in waves.

Jesus spent his ministry telling people to pay attention to their lives to learn what God is like. He gave us rituals and shows how the ordinary of life is sacred. So that every time we eat, we can't help but notice how holy food is.

The couple on their way to Emmaus didn't recognize Jesus. In fact, they were despairing that Jesus had failed them. But they practiced Christian hospitality anyway, and that's when it happened.

That's when they saw him. When they opened to a human experience together, they saw him.

At church, no matter how challenging it can be to be human together, we practice a radically different way of being. Our sacred traditions of breaking bread, passing peace, confessing, forgiving, praying, giving thanks give us something to hold onto when suffering comes. These practices orient us toward the world with compassion. We listen, we help each other see and we remind each other just how loved we are. What we do together at church shows us how we can cultivate peace in our lives and better experience God with us every day.

Christians are different because we believe God became flesh. So Christianity is about becoming more like Christ in our humanity. It's about believing being human is sacred.

Monastic communities all over the world practice opening themselves to the other as if they were Christ. The Rule of St. Benedict says,

“At the door of the monastery, place a sensible brother who knows how to welcome. Give him a room near the entrance so that when visitors come they will always find someone there to answer the door. And as soon as anyone knocks, let that porter say, ‘Thanks be to God: a blessing! A blessing!’”

What if, instead of putting armor on to protect ourselves, we stay open, vulnerable, honest and trust in God's goodness?

What if, when we pass someone on the street or on the train asking for help, we really saw them? Instead of putting our heads down, we take the moment to recognize them, and we soften.

We see them as a beloved child of God.

What could be different if, when the sibling we haven't spoken to in months calls, we think, 'A blessing! A blessing!' instead of, 'What does he want?'

The practices of faith help us see that our lives are full of miracle. Life is painful and doesn't feel holy. But what we do at church and as a community of faith reminds us it's all holy.

We sing the songs of faith in worship. And then when Harry Styles comes on our headphones on a Tuesday and we sing then too, we get the same feeling of gratitude we experience when we sing "Kum Bah Ya. " During every meal we stop and breathe in gratitude. We end up saying please and thank you on the subway. We listen closely when we pray. We notice the flowers and the birds and practice their grace-filled rhythm. We listen extra closely to children because we know we have much to learn from them. We ask for forgiveness and speak only with respect. We trust that giving ourselves, our money, our time away is how we gain our lives. We give ourselves away to others so much, welcoming them into our homes, that our kids ask us if our apartment s ever just going to be ours again. We trust that even when we're despairing, God's still working. Because if it's not love, it's not the end.

If we follow Jesus' lead, we will find ourselves face-to-face with something holy. We will wake up and recognize that this whole world is covered in God's grace. Laundry can be joy and breathing worth saying thank you for. We can be made new.

The resurrection is evidence that God's life-healing energy is at loose in the world. It means that all along this journey, whether we are eating, talking, walking, singing, we are not just passing through.

Let's allow each moment to come alive for us, so we don't miss God with us.

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