**Weekend of Sunday, April 23, 2022**

**3rd Sunday of Easter/Lectionary X/Year A**

**First Reading: Acts 2:14a, 22-32**

**Second Reading: 1 Peter 1:17-23**

**Gospel Reading: John 20:19-31**

**Sermon Title: *“Seeking God in Christ who is Beside Us”***

**Theme**

*Today’s gospel begins with two disciples walking to Emmaus, overcome with sadness, loss, and disappointment. They had hoped Jesus, who was crucified, would be the one to redeem Israel! Yet the risen Christ walks with them and then opens their eyes in the breaking of the bread. Each Sunday our hearts burn within us as the scriptures are proclaimed and Christ appears to us as bread is broken and wine is poured. The story of Emmaus becomes the pattern of our worship each Lord’s day.*

**Texts:**

**First Reading: Acts 2:14a, 36-41**

14aPeter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed [the crowd], 36“Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”  
 37Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” 38Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” 40And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” 41So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

**Second Reading: 1 Peter 1:17-23**

17If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. 18You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, 19but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. 20He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. 21Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.  
 22Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. 23You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

**Gospel: Luke 24:13-35**

13Now on that same day [when Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene,] two [disciples] were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. 18Then 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?” 19He 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, 20and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21But 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. 22Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23and 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. 24Some 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.” 25Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” 27Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.  
 28As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29But 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. 30When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32They 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?” 33That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” 35Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

**Sermon**

Recently in a funeral homily, while referring to the Old Testament Reading, I spoke about the ancient Israelites and how they only turned to God when their collective lives were in shambles. And then I asked rhetorically, "Isn't that just like people?"

That question resurfaced this week as I read the Gospel Reading for today.

Allow me to make some generalizations that are un-researched and then you can tell me how you are.

* I think many of us are like the Israelites who only turned to God when things were already a disaster.
* I think many of us don't turn to God until all our human attempts fail.
* I think when bad stuff happens many of us resort to our human nature to fight or flight, *and not to* surrender and pray. And just to be clear, the surrender I am referring to is to God, not surrender to an enemy.

What do you think? Speaking only for myself, that is how I am. It's not a lack of faith. It's not that I don't think God in Christ will show up – the fact is, in my more clear-headed moments, I fully expect and claim in faith that God will show up.

If you came to me as your pastor in utter frustration and exasperation over a situation in your life, without question, the first thing I would suggest is that we pray about your situation. But when defecation hits the air handler in my life, my sinful human nature is to handle it myself, and it is not until I have proven myself to be incapable that it *occurs* to me that I ought to seek the LORD. It's okay to be disappointed in me, I am disappointed in myself.

One of the souvenirs that I bought for myself in Israel is this bracelet that says in Hebrew, "Be still and know that I am God." I bought it as an ever-present reminder to myself that God is beside me and that I don't have to handle my issues alone. I've only taken it off twice since I got it; once to swim in the super-salty Dead Sea and the second time to go through airport security. I'm not really a jewelry-wearing kind of guy, but I like what this means. Perhaps it would have been better if I would have had it tattooed on my person.

This occurred to me as I was reading the Gospel Reading for today. Allow me to set the stage. It is the afternoon of resurrection Sunday. Two of Jesus's second-tier disciples were walking home to Emmaus from Jerusalem following the celebration of the Passover. You are aware of what happened over that last week. It was the worst experience of their lives and they could not help talking to each other about it. Has that ever happened to you? You just need to talk something out, in the hopes of making sense of a situation.

While they walking along, Luke wrote that the risen Jesus came alongside them,

16but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

Now we could get into the conversation between Jesus and the two disciples but that would just take us to a place this sermon isn't going. We've already heard enough in this one partial verse: *16but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*

Why were their eyes kept from recognizing Jesus? We could rattle off some guesses, and they could all be right – Luke doesn’t specifically say. Frankly, I’ve always wondered if Jesus prevented them from recognizing him to make the moment of his revelation in the breaking of the bread more dramatic.

But I would like us to consider another reason they couldn’t recognize Jesus. Sometimes when I talk to church members that I haven’t seen in a while and they say, “I was hospitalized. I was sick. I lost my job. My marriage is not great. I’m having problems with my child,” or something else equally troubling. And when I ask them why they didn’t call me and let me know they often say, “I didn’t want to bother you with it, and what could you have done anyway?” Ouch! Right to the heart!

You see? Aren’t we just like people? We get so caught up in our own situations that we don’t turn to God who is walking beside us.

I don’t pretend to be God or have the red line to God, but when it comes to *your* situations, I know that we ought to pray about it, and I can lead you in that. James, the brother of Jesus, wrote in his pastoral letter,

James 5:14Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

So you see? This is what we are supposed to do, but so often we don’t. Aren’t we just like people?

In the Second Reading from First Peter, Peter reminded his readers of God’s great love for us in that through the Passion of our Lord Jesus, we “have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, *so that* your faith and hope are set on God.” Not on yourself, not on your remarkable abilities, but on God.

It was never God’s intention in creating you or me or all creation that we have it all together so much that we don’t need God. In fact, the opposite is true. God is a jealous God and craves our attention. And maybe, just maybe, as I said in last week’s sermon, God gives us a test that we cannot pass, simply so that we are drawn back to God. And while you might think that’s not fair, God is God and we are not, and God is jealous for our attention.

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

I think it is worth considering that those two disciples *were just like people*, unable to see what was right before their eyes because they were all tangled up in their own situations. I don’t really know how connected they were to the ministry of Jesus, but Luke called them disciples, and they were distraught and lacking in direction over the loss of their Lord Jesus. The risen Lord Jesus Christ was right there with them, explaining all the theology behind what had just happened in Jerusalem, and they couldn’t see that the stranger was Jesus!

We can understand that. We have found ourselves in situations like that, where we were so upset or confused that we didn’t know which way to turn. But hear me out. We are not alone, we never were, and we never will be. When we find ourselves in unsettling situations we should stop and pray. And if we can’t muster a cogent prayer, call in reinforcements – me or another person strong in faith that you respect.

By the way, there is one more little tidbit in this passage that you wouldn’t necessarily realize. Only one disciple was named, and his name was Cleopas. The name, Cleopas, means, *vision of glory.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ when we acknowledge our human frailties, that we can’t handle everything, and turn to God for God’s help, God will enter into our situations and resolve them with God’s unlimited wisdom and power. And when we get out of the way, and let God do what only God can do, we will see a vision of God’s glory.

**Prayer**

O God, you are a jealous God who craves the attention of your creation. As our Lord Jesus made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread, open the eyes of our faith, so that in all the moments of our lives we may see you at work; a vision of your glory. We pray this in the name of your faithful Son and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen