

Sermon – April 23, 2023 – Easter 3

We've all been dejected at one time or another, just as the disciples on the road to Emmaus were in today's Gospel reading. They had had such great hopes for Jesus and now those hopes had vanished. Their teacher, their mentor had been crucified and his body had disappeared.

We all have our hopes. We hope for love and marriages that will last 'until death do us part'. We hope our children and grandchildren will be healthy and grow up well. We hope for good friendships and for fulfilling work. We hope to enjoy our retirements in good health without financial worries. We hope conflicts in the world will be resolved and that justice will prevail. We hope we'll never get sick and that our loved ones will never die, even though we know that is not possible.

And yet, we all know we live in a world of battered hopes and dreams. Marriages can end, often painfully. Our children can grow away from us and can disappoint us. Some relationships suck away our energy. Friends let us down. Sometimes we work at boring jobs or stressful jobs. Sometimes we become addicted, to work, to alcohol, or drugs. Some of us have financial worries and health worries. We lose the ones we love and grieve because we see them no more. Sometimes we look at the world in despair...tempted to say "It's hopeless!"

And yet, our Gospel today ends in hope. The disciples on the road to Emmaus are transformed. They weren't expecting it but they encounter the risen Christ; when they recognize him, their hope is restored. I remember our principal, the Rev Dr George Sumner at Wycliffe College in Toronto, stressing that it is the risen Christ whom we worship.

And so, as people of the risen Lord...we can be called a resurrection people.

This Easter I've been thinking about us as a 'resurrection' people. I've heard it said that in the Anglican church, we give a lot of attention to Lent, those 40 days of Fasting and Prayer before Easter; but what of the 50 days of Easter afterwards? Do we know as clearly what the season of the resurrection means?

I have come to believe that resurrection or 'new life' is something that our Lord orchestrates over and over throughout all creation. As

Christians, we are called to participate in new life...the gardeners...watering and weeding the fledgling seeds. We are called to bring life always, sometimes out of situations which seem dead and hopeless.

The story of a young man called Terry Fox is a modern day resurrection story. Terry's hopes were dashed when he was diagnosed with cancer and had to lose a leg at the age of 19. He had hoped to get a degree in Kinesiology at Simon Fraser University. His parents had hoped he would marry and have children. Terry had a 50% chance of surviving. Faced with that 50/50 life and death outlook, Terry came up with a life-giving plan, exchanging his old hopes for new hopes. His new hope was to run across Canada to raise money for Cancer research. He hoped to raise \$24 million, one dollar for every Canadian. He called it the 'Marathon of Hope'. So in April, 1980, 43 years ago, in Newfoundland, he dipped his artificial leg into the Atlantic ocean and started his run...a grueling ordeal in every way. The marathon gradually gained attention and by the end, Terry Fox was a celebrity.

But in September, the public gasped at the news that the cancer had returned and that Terry could not complete the run. Terry died less than a year later. Today...the Terry Fox Foundation continues to pursue his dream. It has raised over C\$850 million for cancer research as of September 2022. ...far, far more than Terry could have ever asked or imagined. He will never grow old to us. We remember a young man running westward into the wind, running to buy time and life for thousands. His is a story of new life: staring down death, Terry's vision has continued to bring hope and life...life out of death.

Maybe our own stories of new life will not seem as dramatic and public as Terry Fox's, but new life can happen in big and small ways.

One thing to notice on the road to Emmaus is Jesus' presence. He has found the 2 disciples in their lowest moments. Or has he found them because it is their lowest moment? and he walks along with them as they retreat from a painful situation. We too can count on the risen Jesus to find us in our worst and weakest moments. He is there, when we are discouraged, when we are shocked by the doctor's report, when we are

angry, when we are irritable; when we are hurt; when someone has died. He walks along with us on our road to Emmaus.

The wonderful thing about our risen Christ, is that he offers us new life always. Even when we are weak, when we are at our lowest, he offers us a new way, he offers us hope. He uses us when we are weak, just as he used the broken disciples to proclaim his kingdom. He stands with us in our despair, waiting for us to listen to the truth in his word.

In Today's Gospel

First we meet the risen Christ in his word, the holy scriptures and Second, the risen Christ is revealed in the breaking of the bread, in his Holy Communion.

Christ explains the scriptures to the disciples as they walk on the road to Emmaus.

He 'opens the scriptures' so they understand his crucifixion in a new way.

It was predicted, it was part of God's purpose. Their hope was revived. Perhaps Jesus had done what they had hoped and redeemed Israel! They said later that their hearts burned within them. They were greatly affected. Some say the opening of the scriptures gave them holy heartburn. In the same way today, Christ speaks to us through the scriptures, especially when we gather to worship and hear the proclamation of his word.

But it was when they broke bread together, that Christ was actually revealed to them. Not until the breaking of the bread were their eyes opened to recognize him. The odd thing was that Jesus was not the host in that home, yet he took the part of the host. In the words of the last Supper, he took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them. At that moment they saw who he was. This is a strong message. The risen Christ reveals himself in the breaking of the bread. Our Lord is present when we share this special meal together. It is his body and blood.

The excited disciples jumped up from the table and ran the 7 miles back to Jerusalem. They told what had happened on the road, and how they recognized Jesus when he broke the bread.

Isn't it fitting that the season of Easter and new life happens in spring when what seemed dead in nature comes alive? The buds are bulging out

on the trees. The birds are back. Yellow and purple crocuses are in bloom. After the dying of winter, comes new life in spring! We are called to new life as well, new life in the risen Christ. He equips us with the wisdom of his word and feeds us with the breaking of the bread, his broken body.

So let God grow new life in us. Let us look for the resurrection in our own lives and be open to opportunities to bring life.... New life can happen when we give someone a second chance. New life can happen when we take a risk and try something different. New life can happen when we let go of old unhealthy patterns for new healthier ones. These things seem as miraculous as the appearance of the first crocus in spring. Let us answer Christ's call to new life...as we meet him in his word and in the breaking of the bread. Amen.