

**Christ in Our Midst**  
April 6, In the Year of Our LORD, 2008  
The Third Sunday of Easter  
The Rev. Ralph S. English, Pastor

Luke 24:13-35

I set out yesterday morning to find examples of grace and fault, things beautiful and distasteful, moments of joy and sadness. I found all of that – and so much more! I found grace in the simple gathering in the chapel at Whitehaven by members of the Fraty and Ortman families as they shared in the committal service for Bob Fraty. All of us found beauty in the beam of sunlight as it broke through the stained glass of the chapel as we concluded our time. Two hours later, many of us shared in the joy of the promise of the resurrection as we gathered in this sanctuary to celebrate the wonderful life of Dorothy Chapin.

Echoing chagrin I shared before, I found fault on the sixteen-mile trip from Gates to Whitehaven as, despite 45 MPH signs and lane shifts due this year's construction, people used 490 as a speedway. The trash along the side of the highway was both distasteful and saddening. Granted, at this point in the year, litter is worse as there is six months worth of refuse along our roads and highways. In a couple of weeks, some of us will tackle the two mile route of 531 adopted by our congregation and we will again have an unofficial contest as to who finds the grossest object as thrown from a vehicle. It is amazing what we find! We are left to wonder what on God's green earth people are thinking as they discard items from vehicles!

My search was not unique, but it underscores my thesis - that in so much of our lives, we will find that for which we are looking. If we set out to find grace, beauty and joy, it is very likely that is exactly what we will find. If, on the other hand, we are determined to find fault, that which is distasteful, something to sadden us – or something about which to complain, protest, or even find hypocritical – we will find that as well. The application to our life as a church is that if you come looking for disingenuousness, false fronts, indeed come looking for a Judas, that is what and who you will find. If, however, you come looking for profound examples of grace, hope, reconciliation, peace and love, indeed come looking for Christ, that is what and Who you will find instead. While it may be true that without trying you will find both grace and fault, the question for the day is which of those will drive you, motivate you, and characterize the way you live your life in the days and weeks to come as a person of faith!

Our Gospel Lesson is very telling. The two men walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus were in a quandary. They were disappointed and disheartened because this Jesus of Nazareth had, in the end, not been that all for which they had hoped. The miracles, the teachings, the successful debates with the Pharisees and Scribes and the triumphal entry in to Jerusalem just one week before had heralded so very much – had suggested this was the Messiah, the Promised One, the Redeemer. Yet, all of that had come to naught. It was just forty-eight hours since their hope was dashed on a cruel mechanism of death wrought of the Romans – death on a cross. The man to Whom these people looked was no longer with them and was instead buried in a tomb.

The dilemma these men faced was that on that very day there had been incredible, unbelievable, no, incredulous stories – more like idle tales. Some of Jesus’ followers spoke of the tomb being empty and of other strange occurrences. Some women had even reported seeing the deceased Jesus. Between sadness and incredulousness, these men had reason to be confused and torn. In addition to their confusion, the Scripture tells us they were spiritually blind. Indeed, after joined by Jesus, Whom they failed to recognize, they heard this supposed stranger speak informatively of all that had transpired. This meant these men were spiritually deaf as well! It wasn’t until Jesus was with them at table and broke the bread – in a manner that was apparently unique enough so as to finally make it obvious that this stranger was none other the Risen LORD – that they knew it was He. Then, only then, did they realize their folly – and how they had allowed their sadness to cloud the truth of what had transpired. Just imagine the chagrin and humility with which they related their adventure with Jesus in the years that followed. Here they were, actual eyewitnesses and companions on the road with the Risen Christ and they failed to appreciate it until the very last moment – at which point Jesus disappeared.

For us today, living nearly two millennia later, life can seem to be so confusing – there is much to tear at our souls: family unity in disarray, economic uncertainty that has nearly everyone on edge, debates over energy consumption – and the accompanying skyrocketing price of fuels that have people struggling to balance family budgets, ... to say nothing of strife and war across the globe, genocide in the Darfur region of the Sudan, tension among peoples based on religion, race, ethnicity. And here we are, in the Easter Season, often, seemingly for good reason, living our lives with downcast eyes, aware again of the incredulous story of Easter – but all too often not moved sufficiently to lift ourselves from near despair.

We are not naïve. There is much that is ugly and distasteful in life. We are not going to claim a simple affirmation that will be well if we simply believe all is well. However, as Christians, as People of the Way, followers in faith that is grounded in the truth and reality of the resurrection, we are determined to find and be examples of Christ’s mission and ministry, take on the tasks of love and preaching the good news that comprises our commissioning, and find ways be open to the glories and graces that abound in life. In so doing, we embrace the hope that is ours as persons of faith. We cling to the affirmation that God is in ultimate control, that “things” are not as important as relationships, and that as the church, we can be a people who open our eyes and ears and souls to the wondrous and loving ways of God.

The last half of the last stanza of the hymn we are about to sing puts all of this in the context of our journey of faith, our embrace of what it means to be part of the one church of Jesus Christ – and our embrace of those in the sanctuary today who join our congregation, so that together we might share the good news of Jesus’ resurrection, so that we might know the gifts of grace, the gifts of beauty, the gifts of joy. As we will sing:

Then open Thou our eyes, that we may see; be known to us in breaking of the bread.

As God reveals the Christ to us in the breaking of the bread – the Christ of love, sacrifice, grace, salvation and redemption – so may we then go from this table as persons who announce God’s presence in the midst of all peoples and be a people of love, sacrifice, grace, salvation and redemption for others – that all might know Christ is truly in our midst.

The words of Easter ring true: Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen.