Easter Eyes

Luke 24:13-35 Kimby Young

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Today’s scripture from Luke is one of my favorite Easter resurrection appearance stories. As always, the master story teller Luke paints a detailed and moving picture. It is easy to imagine ourselves walking along that road from Jerusalem to Emmaus with those early disciples. It is easy to understand their confusion and concern at the beginning of the story – the loss they felt at Jesus’ death, the wonder they felt at the women’s stories, the hope that seemed too good to be true, the fear that lingered because of the power of evil in the world. It is easy to imagine how we might have felt – to place ourselves in their shoes as they walked along that road to Emmaus. It is intriguing to try to listen in to the lesson Jesus is teaching, and to imagine how Jesus opened the scripture and revealed truth to the disciples. It is inspiring to imagine the companionship of the journey, the comradery of the conversation, the sincere invitation at the end of the day to come in and dine and stay the night, the warmth of the meal shared, and the shock of the revelation as Jesus broke the bread, as their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus with them. It’s a wonderful story, a fantastic story. It’s a great story in which to immerse yourself and imagine how you would have reacted to the unfolding events of the evening of the first day of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Place yourself there along that road, and walk with Jesus for a short time.

Among the many questions that come up in a good study of this Bible passage, one of the first questions is how could these disciples not have recognized Jesus? The Bible says simply, “they were kept from recognizing him.” There is no explanation. Some have speculated that Jesus was physically different in some way in resurrected form. Some have said perhaps these disciples were really just peripheral disciples that really didn’t know Jesus well, or that it was already dark along the road and they couldn’t see well until they came inside. Some have said that because these disciples couldn’t even imagine Jesus was alive, they weren’t really looking for him. Or perhaps they didn’t think they were important enough for Jesus to come to, so they weren’t even looking. I don’t know the scientific, realistic explanation of why they were kept from recognizing him. But personally and theologically I have known many many times when I overlooked the presence of Jesus right there with me until after a revelation. There are some times you just don’t see what is right in front of you.

Think about it. There is beauty in every day – but we get so busy running around that we don’t even notice. But if something bad happens, we notice that. When something really bad happens it colors our whole outlook. Everything we see is negative. It’s really hard to break that focus and find the positive. It is sometimes really hard to see anything good.

This story reminds us that one of the many gifts of resurrection is the gift of new eyes – eyes to see what is already around you, eyes to see what is good and beautiful and holy, eyes to see the presence of Christ in your daily life, eyes to see the gifts of God’s grace filling each of our days, eyes to see the ways we might respond to God’s love by sharing love in the world. Their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus.

That is one of the invitations of this passage, to allow our eyes to be opened by God’s grace, to notice the gifts of God all around you, to be aware of God’s presence with you, to look for God’s revelation in the world wherever you may be.

So, how is it that God opens our eyes? In many and mysterious ways. In the scripture, the eye opening begins with Bible study. Jesus leads the disciples through the scripture, explaining, interpreting, revealing, making connections, pointing out truth, telling the story of God’s love, showing them how everything pointed forward to this very moment, this journey, this walk with Jesus Christ after the resurrection. The disciples later say, “were not our hearts burning within us while he talked?” Have you ever been in one of those classes, or felt such movement of God as you read scripture? Hearts burning with passion and energy, understanding and revelation? I have been fortunate enough to have some of those “Eureka” experiences – when God touched my heart and opened my eyes. And there is nothing I enjoy more than sharing that experience with others in a Bible study or small group. God speaks. Whether we listen or not, whether we understand fully or not, God speaks. And when we get a glimpse of that truth and power – there is nothing more powerful.

The second and most profound moment of revelation was as they gathered around the table. This is not surprising all the best things are shared around tables – in meals shared, in families gathered, in love poured out. That’s why this table is central in our tradition. That’s why communion is one of our holiest moments in worship. We call it sacramental – holy, mysterious, transformative, grace filled. When we are gathered around any table we are open to receive, to be filled, to enjoy sustenance and satisfaction. Communion is a reminder of all these transcendental, mystical, spiritual, relational gifts of God open to us in the every day elements of bread and drink. Yes this time is holy. But this holy time reminds us that really ALL time is holy. All time is a gift of God. All time gives opportunity for us to connect with God in a real and remarkable way. Jesus stands at the table. Jesus takes bread and gives thanks and breaks the bread and gives it… and all of our eyes are opened that we may recognize Jesus. Recognize Jesus here and now. Recognize Jesus in your every day life. Recognize Jesus as you go out and walk in the world. Recognize Jesus in your home and at your work, in schools and in stores, in streets and fields, and everywhere you go.

The gift of resurrection is that our eyes have been opened. Our lives have been transformed. And we will never walk without Jesus again. We will never not know that Jesus is with us wherever we go.

I said earlier that it is sometimes hard to see the good, the positive, the beautiful, the blessed. Friends, this is the gift of resurrection eyes. You have been blessed by Jesus Christ so that your eyes are now open and you may recognize Jesus with you, wherever you go, whatever you do. Keep your eyes open. Look for it. Look for Jesus. Find the grace of God all around you. Sometimes it is harder to see. But that only means you need to walk a little closer to Jesus, so God can open your eyes to goodness and grace. So Jesus can touch you with healing and strength. So Christ can feed you with bread broken and life poured out.

At the end of this story, the two disciples left home and ran back to Jerusalem. Ran 7 miles in the middle of the night. Ran to tell the others what had happened, to share their experience of Jesus Christ, to explode with the joy of God with them. We who have been blessed by the presence of God with us every day of our lives, we who have been transformed by the resurrected Lord, we who have received the gifts of God daily, have just as much reason to rise up and run – to tell the story of our relationship with Jesus Christ, to share the good news of God’s love for us and for all the world. Our hearts burn within us. Our eyes have been opened. We recognize Jesus among us. Let us run. Let us rise up and run – to share our stories of God’s love, to live resurrected lives – by the grace of God through our Risen Lord Jesus Christ.