

On The Road Again

Well, the mass murderer, public enemy number 1, the man wanted dead or alive, the monster who slayed so many thousands, has been shot dead.

Some ran out into the streets and cheered.

Others hoisted their flags.

Still others sat with quiet satisfaction that justice, together with some measure of vengeance, has finally, at long last, been done.

It is no small irony that this news comes to us as we meet up with Cleopas and his companion, walking on the road to Emmaus.

And as we chat with them, about the death of Jesus, and as we chat with them, about the death of Bin Laden, a stranger joins our travels, a stranger who is also on his way to Emmaus.

We don't recognize the stranger because, like Cleopas, we expected Jesus, who was crucified three days ago, to be the messiah king, the warrior King, the new King David, who would throw out the Romans, restore Israel as a sovereign nation, and keep us all safe with a strong military, financial wealth and homeland security.

What a disappointment this Jesus turned out to be!

We share that disappointment with the stranger.

Then the stranger begins to explain, that God's ways don't involve shock and awe.

That God's ways don't include water boarding or preemptive wars or even self-defense.

He explains that suffering is not so much about something to endure, but is rather the lens through which we might peer into the eternal.

And as we walk, we can't help but continue our eavesdropping on the strange words of the stranger: he says something about giving up in order to receive; he says something else about forgiving the unforgivable; and then again about dying in order to live.

And something of that truth perhaps lights a small ember in your heart, in mine.

An ember that reveals that our lust for getting even, for our kind of justice, our kind of revenge, places us squarely in the service of death.

The stranger, ever so patiently, explains that if we turn around and lean toward reconciliation, lean toward accepting suffering without returning it; we have somehow then stumbled into the mystery of the God this Jesus calls Papa.

Such transformation, from revenge to forgiveness, from anger to acceptance, from control to letting go, occurs slowly, and only over the course of a long journey.

Yet even when we don't feel ready, somewhere along the road, something happens, like bread that is broken and shared.

Perhaps then we shall see.

It is the longing for that transformation that quietly gathers us here today; all of us, with Cleopas and his friend, to again take, bless, break and share the bread and the cup; the body and blood of our Lord.

In the breaking of his body, in the pouring out of his blood, is the vulnerable suffering of our God; the suffering we are invited to share in.

Because with God, suffering and death are not the last word.

The Suffering One has been raised from the dead. That which we fear to the bone has been defeated.

Suffering and death no longer have the last word.

And we are each of us summoned, on this journey of ours, to trust that truth, not only in our Sunday best, but at our Monday worst as well.

We are summoned to trust that truth not only as we celebrate the making of new saints, but even when the very worst of sinners stands in the public square.

It is a long process, not easily or quickly accomplished. But we will get there. That is the promise of Emmaus.

"In 'The Happy Hypocrite' Max Beerbohm tells about a regency rake named Lord George Hell, debauched and profligate, who falls in love with a saintly girl, and in order to win her love, covers his bloated features with the mask of a saint. The girl is deceived and becomes his bride, and they live together happily until a wicked lady from Lord George Hell's wicked past turns up to expose him for the scoundrel she knows him to be and challenges him to take off his mask. So sadly, having no choice, he takes it off, and lo and behold beneath the saint's mask is the face of the saint he had become by wearing it in love." Buechner, *Telling the Truth*, 80.

He is transformed, simply by practicing a new way of life.

Another word for transformation is, of course, revolution.

Which is what the resurrection of Jesus is all about.

A revolution that changes us as individuals from the inside out and a revolution that will in time change societies inside out as well.

We Christians are the advance guard of that revolution; and so we are called to put on the mask of reconciliation, to put on the mask of forgiveness, to put on the mask of gentleness; even when it comes to the very worst among us, even when it comes to the Bin Ladens, so that in time, with much effort and many failures, our true face may shine like the Son, in the presence of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

This is the destiny to which we are each of us called.

This is where the road to Emmaus leads.

Will you come along?

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