

Emmaus

Today's gospel takes us right into the heart of human fixes that by the grace of God are transformed with divine delight.

It's the day of the resurrection, for those with eyes to see, but Cleopas and his unnamed companion have pinned their hopes entirely on human fixes, fixes that hoped Jesus would be the warrior king, the one to roust the Romans, to take his seat on David's throne, and rule all of Israel for a thousand years, waving the time honored banner that reads: "Peace Through Strength!"

Their hopes were all tangled up with nationalism and the glory of slaughter.

And when it all comes crashing down, when this strange Jesus refuses to gather armed men or armed angels, but instead submits to the powers of the day; to the religious high horses and the imperial Roman empire, well, Cleopas and his unnamed friend head out, on the long road to Emmaus; that road to the next human fix for the grief that overwhelms them.

We've all walked this road.

The road to ..." Emmaus might be buying a new suit or a new car or smoking more cigarettes than you really want, or reading a cheap novel....

Emmaus may even be going to church on Sunday.....

.....because Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go when we try to forget that the world holds nothing sacred; that even the wisest and bravest and loveliest decay and die; that even our noblest ideas — ideas about love and freedom and justice — are always twisted out of shape by selfish men for selfish ends." Beuchner. *The Magnificent Defeat*, pp 85-86. paraphrased.

But as they head back with heads hanging low, back to the life where power crushes, and dogs eat dog, someone stops them dead in their tracks.

Lest we think we have a leg up on them, because we know it's Jesus, just hold that thought for a bit — because I'll bet you dollars to donuts that Jesus has stopped you dead in your tracks too — and if you're anything like me, you didn't know it was him either.

He may have been the bum on the street corner, or the old woman singing hymns, or the infant child newly wet from being baptized...oh, he's stopped everyone of us you know, if we have the eyes to see....

And now he's stopping these two.

He asks what's happening, and they look at him with shock at his ignorance as they immediately pour out the why and what and wherefore of the last few days.

Funny how the only fellow who actually knows what's happening is the one asking the questions, while the ones doing all the talking have no idea about what's really going on.

But that's Jesus for you.

In the 1970's Playboy Magazine caused a huge ruckus when they published a drawing of Jesus laughing.

People thought it disrespectful, as lacking the proper decorum.

But I gotta believe that Jesus does lots of laughing!

Not only does he eat and drink with folks who know how to have a good time, but he tells stories about God that are hilarious!

Like how God is somehow like the irate neighbor who's roused from bed to stumble downstairs and give bread and beer to the fellow next door; or how God is somehow like a crooked employee who's smart about making friends; how God is like the embarrassing dad who hikes up his pants and runs to welcome home the deadbeat son who burned through the family jewels on a romp through Vegas; or how the kingdom of God is like a pile of smelly yeast; or like that nuisance of a fast growing mustard weed, that invades and overwhelms gardens.

So I gotta believe Jesus is biting his lip while the two Emmaus bound friends are doing their talking.

The human fix doesn't work, never has, never will...

The human fix is another disaster.

And so, back to Emmaus, back to life in front of the TV, back to that glass of gin, back to the life of boring predictability.

That's Emmaus.

And yet.....

It seems that only here, at the end of the road for a human fix, in the midst of hopeless despair, when we reach the end of our own resources, when our own best thinking brings us face to face with a solid brick wall, here comes Jesus, with something we might call divine delight.

Divine delight takes them back through the Scripture and shows them.....what?

Divine delight opens their minds to the God who is not the God of military power or coercion or punishment, but to the God who patiently waits; who demonstrates his power through the misery of the cross, who brings about transformation not through the barrel of a gun or the edge of a sword, but through stubborn, unconditional, persistent love.

Divine delight shares with them how, in Jesus, death is not so much defeated as it is somehow included in life – so that it's not like death does something to Jesus and then God reaches into the grave and undoes it – like a resuscitation or a reincarnation – but rather that Jesus does something to death, by somehow ending the conflict between life and death, by somehow taking up, and swallowing death into life.

Divine delight explains to Cleopas and his friend all the things in Scripture which concern Jesus, starting with Moses and the Prophets—not so much telling them that the Hebrew Bible is all about Jesus, as much as explaining to them, how from the beginning, Moses and the Prophets find themselves in the grasp of the one true God, who is Life, in the grasp of the one true God who swallows death, in the grasp of the one true God before whom no one is dead, but all are alive. Steve Godfrey, paraphrased.

Somehow, when we finally muster the willingness to take a step back, it is divine delight that steps in, and brings us home to a place we never dared to even dream exists: home to a place where surrender awakens in the lap of victory, where weakness overcomes the strongest strength, where death is swallowed whole by life.

In our weekday lives, even here in our church lives, it's so easy to get caught up with our own love affairs of how and what to do, how we deal with family and each other, how we shape our ministries, so that we can often get in the way of what God is already doing.

Days like today invite us to stop dead in our tracks, and to remain there for a while, quietly listening, asking for the grace to see that narrow door that leads to a different way, a way to take that step back out of our own limelight, so that the light of Christ can shine.

That door is love.

And we see it today as they think they are coming to the end of their journey.

It seems he's continuing on ahead of them.

"Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over."

He joins them at the table.

And with the grace of hospitality, the guest becomes the host, and at long last, he takes, blesses, breaks and gives the bread.

And they see him, and he vanishes.

At long last they come to see.

Salvation isn't in weapons or might, it is in self-giving service, a pouring out through the simplicity of bread, through the common drink of wine, and a human fix gives way to divine delight.

As they race back to Jerusalem, Jesus smiles.

And we can too.

+amen