

## **"Conversations in Traumatic Times" – Luke 24:13-35 – April 26, 2020**

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I've noticed something, and perhaps you have, too. In all my recent conversations, the pandemic has been part of the conversation. Sometimes, it's peripheral. On Tuesday afternoon, the contractor finished work on my roof. He gave me completed paperwork, and I gave him a check. As I thanked him for his good work, my impulse was to reach out with my right hand to shake his. Of course, I refrained, mindful of the spread of germs. He was one of the few in person humans I had seen over the past few weeks. In a world of few personal connections, I would miss our brief, daily chitchats.

On Wednesday I called the residence where my mom lives. I asked the employee if there were any way I could see my mother, through a window or something, as it had been four weeks since I had seen her. When I arrived, I sat in a chair as they wheeled my mom up to the glass door that separated us. She kept wanting to open the door to let me in. I had to keep reminding her that I wasn't allowed inside. She asked why not. And over and over I had to remind her of the pandemic.

Then there are the phone calls, or the visits or meetings via Zoom. Always, the conversation touches on the pandemic and the utter havoc it has caused. We talk about how odd things are, how we took visits to the store or meals at restaurants for granted. We reminisce about how not too long ago we believed we would be back to normal by Easter. And now we wonder if our summer plans will materialize. Or even our fall plans. We marvel at how one tiny virus could bring the world to its knees. We lament the toll it has taken on those whose resources are few. We worry about our families and friends. We wonder if the economy will ever recover. We agonize over own inability to control even the most basic parts of our lives. And the worry takes its toll on our emotional and physical health.

Imagine this scenario, you're sitting out on your front porch or patio, eyes closed as you take in a bit of spring sunshine, but your mind still dwells on the situation at hand. Suddenly you're jolted alert when you feel a hand tapping your shoulder and hear a strange voice, mere inches away from your ear, asking you a question. Adrenalin starts pumping and you feel your body tense up as you holler, "Get back! What are you doing?" The person quickly draws away, sensing your fear, and asks innocently, "What's the matter? Everyone is acting so strangely, what's going on?" Shocked, you grab your face mask and hand sanitizer as you respond indignantly, "What's going on? Have you been living under a rock? Everything has changed!"

If you can imagine how you might feel in that moment, you might understand a bit of what the two disciples were feeling when Jesus came upon them on the road to Emmaus.

The two of them were on the way home following the Passover in Jerusalem. One is named – Cleopas. The other is perhaps his wife. While they were not part of the Twelve, they certainly were disciples of Jesus, and they were devastated by what had taken place in Jerusalem. And like the others, they couldn't believe the amazing story that the women brought back from the empty tomb. So, their hopes dashed, they journeyed home.

As Jesus recounted to them God's salvation history, he was reminding them that this moment in time was merely a part of a much larger story. That even in the midst of tragedy, hope can never die.

They were focusing on the trees, when a much larger forest surrounded them. While Jesus was speaking to them on the road, even though they didn't know who he was, they felt the power of his words, describing the feeling as their hearts burning within them. That is the flame of hope rekindled. In the midst of tragedy, the stirrings of God's much larger promise reminded them that all is never lost.

And then it was in the breaking of the bread, as Jesus came into their home to share a meal, that their eyes were fully opened to the truth that had journeyed alongside them. This power of Christ's presence with them compelled them to get up and go back to Jerusalem, to share this good news with the other disciples. It was the bigger picture, the bigger story of God's redeeming work in the world that gave them the hope and the strength to move beyond the tragedy of the moment.

Times of uncertainty, times of trauma, by their very nature force us to dwell in the present moment. Our brains and bodies kick in to survival mode, and we remain ever alert to the danger that surrounds us. That is not a bad thing. It is that deep, primordial part of our brains that jump into action to keep us safe. Living in survival mode is wearing on our bodies and minds. So of course, we feel tired and worn out and we miss all the security that stable life gives us. So as we reside in this present moment, we will, of course, think about it and talk about it.

But Christ reminds us to take the time to step outside of the present moment to consider the bigger picture. We are part of a much larger story, and we are heirs of the promises of God. We are not the first generation in God's family to experience trauma on such a grand scale. The witness of those who have gone before us assure us that God is ever present, even in the seeming silence. And the promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that darkness and death never have the last word and can never separate us from God's love.

In the days and weeks and months to come we will continue to face the effects of this pandemic and its influence on the world around us. It will be hard. It is already hard. Our bodies and brains will continue to do what they do best, to keep us alert to danger and stress. And that's okay. We will continue to have conversations with ourselves and one another about how strange this all is. Maybe we'll share our fears and anxieties with each other or maybe we will hold them inside us. We will see people struggle, and we will reach out the best way we know how, to help them. Because that is what we do.

Times will be hard and we will find ourselves locked into the present trauma. The empty tomb of Easter assures us that Christ walks with us. The empty tomb of Easter reminds us that God's promises are true. The empty tomb of Easter encourages us to never give up on hope. Let us remember the bigger story, unhindered by present afflictions, and let us allow hope to kindle its fire within our hearts.