

“But Now I See”
Luke 24:13-35
Third Sunday of Easter

Luke 24:13-35

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”

They stood still, looking sad.

¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?”

¹⁹He asked them, “What things?”

They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.

²¹“But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

“Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.

²²“Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”

²⁵Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.”

So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him;

and he vanished from their sight.

³²They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!”

³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The Sermon

In the photograph from a charming small town somewhere in the American heartland,ⁱ a man with long, silvery hair, a leather vest and a pair of lived-in blue jeans with a biker belt is standing before a small gathering of motorcycles and their bikers.

On what appears to be a bracing spring morning, overcast and verdant, Darrell Best is offering a blessing for a safe motorcycle season.ⁱⁱ He's a Safety and Education representative for a campaign that took place about ten years ago, whose motto was: "Start Seeing Motorcycles."

As a safety awareness campaign, it was aimed at both motorcyclists and all other drivers. But the motto has an obvious implication for one of those groups in particular: all other drivers, on four or more wheels, who pass by, or around, or behind, or in front of, or at intersections with motorcycles, all the time.

It was believed that it was time for them to start *seeing* what had always been there,

in front of their eyes, but somehow so easily missed or ignored that, as far as most drivers knew, it was usually hidden from their view—if it was even to be believed that it had ever been there at all.

Darrell Best offered some reasons for that:

"Motorcycles are smaller and look farther away than they actually are."

"It is easy for them to be in a [car or truck] driver's blind spot."

"The structure of a car can hide the cyclist from the driver's view."

It looks farther away than it really is. It's easy for it to be in our blind spot. The structures that we move in can hide it from our view.

“While the two grieving disciples were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”

Bill Bryson's book of travels around Australia from 2000 touches occasionally on the unseen people, the Aborigines. In several anecdotes, he has the impression that Australia's indigenous people are practically invisible to the mainstream society, even as there are, and have been, many white individuals are quite caring and interested.

That specific part of the history of the last 200 years is breathtakingly, achingly cruel and tragic, exasperating in the insanity of its casual brutality.

Toward the end of his book, Bryson is having some coffee in one of the cities, and notices that all the Aboriginal people he sees, for reasons he wonders about but doesn't explore in depth, seem to have injuries, maladies, or wounds of one kind or another.ⁱⁱⁱ

In his observation, “the people on the street were overwhelmingly white Australians, but there were Aborigines about, too—not great numbers of them, but always there, on the edge of the frame, unobtrusive, nearly always silent, peripheral. The white people never looked at the Aborigines, and the Aborigines never looked at the white people. The two races seemed to inhabit separate but parallel universes.”^{iv}

Later, he wrote, “As I sat...with my coffee and watched the mixed crowds...I realized that I didn't have the faintest idea what the solution to all this was.... If I were contracted by the Commonwealth of Australia to advise on Aboriginal issues all I could write would be: ‘Do more. Try harder. Start now.’”

“So without an original or helpful thought in my head, I just sat for some minutes and watched these poor disconnected people shuffle past. Then I did what most white Australians do. I read my newspaper and drank my coffee and didn’t see them anymore.”^v

For many of us, in many aspects of our lives, including our social ethics; our relationships or lack of relationship with people who have less historically inherited power than we do; our spiritual awareness; our sense of whether we are doing what we were put here to do and living up to the promise that God built into us from before the foundation of the world—

for most or all of us, in those and other aspects of our lives, our prayer of confession and our daily charge is pretty much what Bryson listed in the face of not knowing what in the world else to suggest:

Do more.

Try harder.

Start now.

Because there is so much right before our eyes that we don’t even see.

It may give us some measure of comfort, I guess, to realize that from Day One of the era of the resurrected Christ,

Good, faithful, conscientious disciples have been “not seeing.”

Cleopas and his traveling conversation partner, by all appearances kind, faithful, intelligent, humane people, stand for all of us disciples:

Not seeing Jesus in the stranger.

Not seeing Jesus while we “walk along.”

Not seeing Jesus even when we tell the story.

Not seeing Jesus when it is almost evening and the day is nearly over.

Not even seeing Jesus among us when we invite someone into safe shelter and share our food with them at our table. What could be more right and good and humane and even risk-taking? There’s no moral here that says, “These two idiots failed to behave in a Christian way, so God punished them by not letting them see him.” It’s entirely the opposite. They welcomed a stranger into their shelter and fed him at their table.

That’s Luke going one better than Matthew, who gave us the passage in Matthew 25 where Jesus says, Blessed are you when you do this for the least of these, for when you do it to them, you do it to me. In Luke, *he’s* the stranger they shelter and feed.

It wasn’t until that first post-resurrection communion:

Jesus took bread, and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

Then our eyes are opened, and we recognize him—

that most sacred, usually unexpected moment when we become an unsuspecting *recipient* of the divine grace of knowing and feeling his presence—

but only as a glimpse before he vanishes from our sight.

Have you ever had a moment like that? If you haven’t, it’s OK. There’s nothing wrong with you or lacking in your faith.

I’ve had three that come powerfully to mind, two of which were times when I was in desperate spiritual circumstances: once, it was a sense of

assurance, kind of a “don’t worry; I’ve got this” announcement that just came out of the blue; the other time, it was the almost tactile feeling of a loving arm being unexpectedly draped over my shoulder that just came to me in the emotional darkness for about one second, which was enough.

The other was so mundane that it left me with the mildly disconcerting suspicion that the Most High Maker of the Universe had just reached out from the holy depths of eternity to play peek-a-boo with a 42-year-old who was just sitting there minding his own business.

I don’t usually share those kinds of experiences, specifically *because* by nature they sound so questionable, kind of, “well, that sounds like it was probably just your imagination.” (*You* may not be telling me that, but trust me, even at this moment, there’s a place inside where I’m saying it to myself.)

The truth is: while Easter is about the joy of Christ’s resurrection, we can *know* that from a faith perspective, but we don’t always feel it.

I’m still entertained by the title of a book by Jack Kornfield that talks about how Easter is exciting, and can be a big kind of jolt for our faith, but as soon as church is out *that day*, we still have our mundane lives and responsibilities to deal with. The book is called, “After the Ecstasy, the Laundry.”

Along with those disciples on the first evening of a totally changed universe, wherein love has decisively and irrevocably overcome death and a new life has begun,

we have received an assurance that even after the cosmic and universal triumph of Easter, our common, earthly life still goes on. Said the other way: even as life goes on, Easter has triumphed.

God is always God, and God is always love, and Jesus is always breathing peace into the world and offering not only for you, but in you and through you, springs of the water of life to nourish all creation.

It is real when you feel it, and—by definition—it’s just as real when you’re not particularly feeling it.

The poet Marie Howe, thinking about the astrophysicist Stephen Hawking, wrote about what science calls the Big Bang, and what is, from a faith perspective, God’s conception of all existence: how, in a moment that is both incomprehensible and plainly undeniable, once there was nothing, not even empty space; and then, there was something.

The Big Bang theory starts with a singularity: the idea that all matter and all everything, was, in the beginning, impossibly condensed into one atom that exploded and formed, or is still forming, the universe.

Maybe that’s the way God did it. It would be entirely compatible with the foundations of what Christians believe, namely, four words: in the beginning, God.

The poem is called, “Singularity.”^{vi}

Do you sometimes want to wake up to the singularity
we once were?

so compact nobody
needed a bed, or food or money —

nobody hiding in the school bathroom
or home alone

pulling open the drawer
where the pills are kept.

For every atom belonging to me as good
Belongs to you. Remember?

There was no Nature. No
them. No tests

to determine if the elephant
grieves her calf or if

the coral reef feels pain. Trashed
oceans don't speak English or Farsi or French;

would that we could wake up to what we were
— when we were ocean and before that

to when sky was earth, and animal was energy, and rock was
liquid and stars were space and space was not

at all — nothing

before we came to believe humans were so important
before this awful loneliness.

Can molecules recall it?
what once was? before anything happened?

No I, no We, no one. No was
No verb no noun
only a tiny tiny dot brimming with

is is is is is

All everything home

The Royal Hospital Chelsea, in London, is a hospital and care facility for British soldiers who have given up their pension to live out their final years there. Outside the building, easily seen by the public passing by, is a monumental obelisk, onto which is inscribed, at a level where it meets your sightline, words attributed to a commander in the 17th century:

“If I forget thee, do not thou forget me.”^{vii}

I know you don’t always remember, God says. But I remember you.

I know you don’t always see me. But I see you.

And you may or may not be feeling in love with me at any given time.

But I always, always, always love you.

May all of our hearts burn within us when he tells us what we are.

And even when you can’t see Jesus, may you know deep in your bones that it’s OK. He is still right there beside you: walking with you, teaching you, accepting your gracious hospitality and eating at your table.

Keith Grogg
Montreat Presbyterian Church
Montreat, NC
April 26, 2020

ⁱ Shelbyville, Illinois, to be precise

ⁱⁱ Valorie Eversole, “‘Start Seeing Motorcycles’ Campaign Stresses Cycling Safety” (Shelbyville, IL: Daily Union, May 6, 2010) https://www.shelbyvilledailyunion.com/news/start-seeing-motorcycles-campaign-stresses-cycling-safety/article_40cdc9f7-7751-5a19-8f27-614d30b9cffd.html

ⁱⁱⁱ Bill Bryson, *In a Sunburned Country* (New York: Broadway Books, 2000), 269-70. 273.

^{iv} Bryson, *Sunburned*, 269

^v Bryson, *Sunburned*, 273.

^{vi} <https://www.brainpickings.org/2018/05/22/singularity-marie-howe-stephen-hawking/>

^{vii} Jacob Astley (1579-1652), a Royalist commander in the English Civil War, in a prayer before the Battle of Edgehill (1642), as quoted by Sir Philip Warwick in *Memoires* (1701).