

Sermon for 23 April 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Third Sunday of Easter

Scriptures: Acts 2:14a. 36-41; Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 (*Insert: Response 2:Spoken*); 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

«**Easter evening**»

These Sundays after Easter are more like plays than readings.

At least there's a kind of gentle, movie-like flavor to today's lesson from Luke. Two people walking together meet a stranger, get to talking, stop at an inn –and then add to the series of breathless reports that make up this side of our life as believers.

Luke is a master at such descriptions, and we can never stop thanking God for his gifts and his generous sharing of them among the early believers.

I want to add my stories to his when I testify, and when I explain why I'm here. There's a quality of trust and up-close, breathless truth to my love of Jesus that I never want to leave out of why I walk with Jesus. I pray that with you, as we live as members of the risen body of Christ.

My faith happens in these simple, amazing moments, when suddenly I accept the calmness of my breathing, the surprising kindness of a stranger, or the naturalness of some resolution to problem I'm working over with others.

Light just comes. Over time, with the discipline of prayer and daily use of scripture and all the routines of Golden Rule living, inner peace comes, and I even find the courage to speak up for justice, or hold my tongue and cooperate...

Life is full of these signs, as we spoke of them last Sunday. I am able to ask for forgiveness. I find myself preparing for a tense moment by reminding myself I have a choice: Either I go in full of recollections of how irritating this or that person can be, or I say, "You can open yourself to another possibility" ... and afterwards I'm amazed at how smoothly things have gone.

I see this story of Easter evening as one of the gifts people were finding themselves open to in the days and early years following Jesus' death. Here, and then there; told this way, and then another way; found together with others, and also in complete aloneness ... this conviction that life really was full of peace, and power for good, and healing of all kinds, emerged and expanded. In the midst of all the abuse of that time, including the fundamental unfairness of life under the Roman Empire, a hope, a courage, spread all over that part of the world ...and now we are asked to go and do likewise.

This is the power of Easter evening. I hope we can share examples of it, and that we can go forth from here beautifully re-fitted for living it where we are, as we recognize that the Master himself has been with us, and can be trusted to come again and again, just as we need him. Amen.

