

Dude, where have you been? Easter 3 – 26 April 2020

Most of you know that I don't always follow the news. And in these times it's especially challenging to watch without ending up down a rabbit hole of information and misinformation. When I finished worship last Sunday I had seen a headline about a shooting in Portapique, Nova Scotia. I ended up transfixed with abject terror until I realised hours had passed by and I hadn't moved from where I was sitting.

I got up and went out for a walk. I began to pray. I wanted to cry, but was unable to.

I chose not to watch the memorial service on Friday. Instead I went for a long walk and prayed as I walked. For those who were killed. For those who survived. For the shooter. For his family. For the community. For Canada. And for the world. And still I could not cry. I did, however, get quite lost on this perambulation, but that's another story.

Today's gospel is about two guys, stunned from the events of the past few days. They are in shock and disbelief about what has happened to Jesus. They have no idea what is going to happen next. They have no idea where it is safe to go.

Jesus appears as these two guys are walking to Emmaus. Actually, it could be a guy and a girl, we aren't told. At any rate, they don't recognize him. We know one is called Cleopas, but we don't know the name of the other. It could be Cleopas's wife. It could be Cleopas's son. We aren't told.

I'm going to paraphrase what happened as they were walking.

Jesus – Hey! How's it going?

Cleopas – Hello?

Jesus – What's going on? You two seem sad.

Cleopas – Dude, where have you been? Are you the only stranger who has not heard of what happened? This preacher, Jesus, we had hoped that HE was the one. You know, THE ONE! The Messiah.

Jesus – Oh. Oh really? Tell me more.

Cleopas – Jesus of Nazareth, like, duh, you've really not heard of him? We had hoped that he was the one to release us from Roman rule. It wasn't to be. Our political and religious officials decided he was just a common criminal and he was crucified between two thieves. Then the ladies went to prepare his body for burial after the Passover got the tomb and DUDE WAS NOT THERE! There were angels and they told the ladies that Jesus was ALIVE. Can you believe it? I mean, is this fake news or what?

Jesus – Dude, you really don't know your scripture all that well, do you? If you did you would know that the Messiah HAD to suffer and then he would go to heaven. Let me remind you...

And Jesus told Cleopas and his companion about everything from Moses onward. He told of how Jesus fit into the stories. He explained and interpreted story after story from scripture. Now, Jesus knew the customs of the time. You would never let a stranger travel alone, especially at night. So Jesus was invited for supper.

And as the guest he would be invited to say the blessing over the bread as they dined

together. He picked up the loaf of bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them. Remember, take, bless, break and share, the same actions which are the foundations to the Lord's Supper, Eucharist or Communion.

In THAT moment his dining companions realise it is him. Then he vanished from their sight as soon as they knew it was him.

Rude.

But seriously, imagine how they are feeling. They are heartbroken, with all that has happened in the last three days. They see a stranger on the road who walks with them and who knows more about scripture than anyone they have ever met. They extend hospitality and invite him to supper. And when he takes, blesses, breaks and shares the bread they realise who it is.

YET! Before they can get their mind around this, he disappears from their sight.

How would you feel in that moment?

Shocked? Pleased? Excited? Bewildered?

Likely all those things and more.

How have we felt over the past five weeks?

Shocked – what do you mean we are closing the Church doors.

Pleased – yet we will have options to worship together online.

Excited – we know this won't be for long...will it?

Bewildered – ummm, just HOW LONG will this last?

This year, the Readings for Lent, Holy Week and Easter have taken on a different and deeper significance. While they were written thousands of years ago, they are very relevant for today. We, too, feel shocked. We, too, feel angry. We, too, feel bewildered.

We don't know how long this is going to last, until we can see each other face to face, sing together and hug each other. Until we can see each other, touch each other and join together in the taking, blessing, breaking and sharing of the bread and the cup.

In Peter's letter he says "He (Jesus) was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your (our) sake. Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God."

Peter goes on to remind us that because we have been purified through Jesus, we must "love one another deeply from the heart." He reminds us that we have been "born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God."

Please let that sink in.

Peter, the one who denied Jesus three times after, only moments before, swore he would

never do such a thing. The same Peter who recognized Jesus first as the Messiah and was then warned not to tell a soul. The same Peter who enjoyed breakfast with Jesus on the shore.

This same Peter who got it so right and yet so wrong, reminds us of the gracious gift of God and forgiveness to us. He reminds us that we must "love one another, deeply from the heart". The crux of the new commandment Jesus gave us "Love God above all else, and love your neighbour as yourself."

Love.

In this crazy time when we are faced with news reports of a man who methodically picks up a gun, plans a horrific act and carries it out. A man whom I will not name. How are we to respond to this senseless violence?

With shock. With anger. With outrage. With fear. And when the dust of that is settled we are called back to our core. We are to called to love.

Yes, love. Because when we act from anger or fear that leads us to hatred. Hatred that will eat us alive.

We have a choice to make. Every single day. A choice to respond with fear and hatred or with love and hope. It is not an easy choice.

What happened in Nova Scotia should never have happened and that community and province will never be the same.

I don't believe any of us could have foreseen COVID-19 and it's devastating effect on our communities, both large and small. And yet, here we are.

We cannot go back to where we were before all this happened. We simply cannot. What we can do, what we must do, is remember the hope. Remember the joy. Remember the love we have shared and continue to share.

We cannot go back to thinking there is only one way to do things.

We must not return to the "same old things" because it's the easy way to do it.

We MUST take our history, our learning and our love and develop something new, filled with hope, peace, joy, kindness and love.

Our buildings have been decorated with sidewalk chalk by both parishioners and the neighbourhood children. This is the time we reach outside our doors, because we cannot gather inside those buildings, and remind the communities in which we live that the Church is so much more than the building. That the Church is the gathering of disciples, from wherever we are. That we are called to serve and be of service in whatever way we can, especially through prayer.

So, while Jesus left his friend Cleopas and his companion, they were gifted a new piece of the puzzle. Jesus, in fact WAS alive. They had seen him with their own eyes. And

nothing would ever be the same.

So, too, it is with us. We may not have seen the Messiah face to face, but we have seen the worst and the best of humanity over these past many weeks. We have choices to make, to respond in fear or in hope.

And once we emerge from this time of isolation we will never be the same. We simply cannot be. What then, is your choice? As for me, I choose love.

Thanks be to God.

Third Sunday after Easter

Acts 2.1-4a, 36-41

Psalm 116

1 Peter 1.17-23

Luke 24.13-35

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