

Easter III Year A 2014

“Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days? What things he asked.”

There once were two people on a journey..... How many stories begin in that way.... Indeed, in the world of literature the journey is a recurrent genre, a recurrent archetype... Odysseus’ journey home.... Jason and his comrades and their quest for the golden fleece.... The pilgrims’ journey to Canterbury... Don Quixote’s search for honor and the heroic.... Huck Finn.... The Grapes of Wrath.... Dorothy and the Wizard of Oz.... Blood Meridian.... You’ve read your share... and you’ve also heard around the dinner table tales of journeys.... We are perhaps the most animated when we tell tales of our journey.

Why is that? What is it about a journey that so captures our attention... our imaginations... Back in the day, we had to wear our nicest clothes when flying on an airplane... Remember... We get prepared for something mysteriously important... I wonder what that is? Maybe it is that our senses quicken for a journey... we’re more alive... Our senses quicken out of necessity... because a journey is provisional, contingent to the improbabilities of the road... On a journey we expose ourselves to the dangerous contingencies of adventure... Our attentions are heightened, our adrenaline spikes... our anxiety wells up... Our conversations more poignant... some of the deepest conversations in memory happened on the road.... And a journey is transformational... We change on the road... We are not the same travelers at journey’s end... The journey indeed is a metaphor for life itself... real life... It is full of discovery, adventure, danger... there is no greater intimacy than that of the road... On the road we must trust deeply our fellow travelers. We really have no choice... That is why we choose carefully our travel companions... and there is always the presence of the mysterious, improbable stranger on the road, the stranger whom we must trust as well... an unlikely oracle perhaps speaking truth born of the alien landscape of our epic story... a story told of a day... the word journey simply means, “of a day”... a story that bears account of the one story common to us all; all our journeys variations upon the one grand theme.

In Luke’s story two travelers are on the road for a day-long journey... a journey for which they weren’t fully prepared upon leaving... one is never fully prepared for the journey... They leave the city full of fear and grief and despair.... They are in crisis (crisis in the Greek meaning ‘re-

ordering')... They are suspect... their lives are in danger... their hopes dashed... They are engaged in passionate conversation... because that is what happens on the road... trying to make sense of their world that is falling apart.... And the stranger they meet invites them to tell their story, to tell about the things encountered on the road.... And in sharing it, even amid their hopelessness, their hearts begin to burn. They burn with meaning and with hope and with love... love for the journey, love for life... their hearts burn with the recognition that their stories are in truth part of the one true story... that their sojourn in the world is of epic proportions... that they matter, evidenced by their burning hearts.... Truth encountered on the road... there is no other place of such encounter... and the journey, the crisis ends, resolves with a meal, at table with the stranger met on the road... always a fitting end to a journey, a meal in which all are hosts, and all are guests... sacred nurture for the way ahead... nurture for the next day's journey to come.... The meal a powerful symbol of love... artful sacrifice for the nurture of one's neighbor.

This is a story of love.... A story that speaks of companionship for the road... a story in which the stranger is deemed one of us... On the road there is intimate solidarity, vibrant community.... The certain knowledge that we are contingent to one another along life's wending journey.... Love is that we give ourselves wholeheartedly to the road... On the road we discover ourselves, and therefore we discover God... We give ourselves to the awareness that we are but travelers on the way, that is all... travelers... We never arrive... we only pay attention to the signs along the way and care for our fellow travelers.... And, the journey is only for a day... after a day it is gone.... And we can only bring our stories along, all else doesn't matter.... Only that we give account of that which makes our hearts burn which is food enough for such a journey....

There is a familiar stranger who waits in the road to hear such an account... mysterious but familiar, this stranger, a stranger a lot like us... With courage welcome him... With courage welcome her into your story... break bread with your fellow travelers unafraid...

It has long been my contention that it is not death we fear most in life... but that it is life itself... We hesitate at the journey's threshold.... For the journey is not safe; it is stressful, ambiguous... but it is full of meaning... and there we might encounter a stranger, a stranger much like us... who bids us to give account of the secrets of the journey.... To know the traveler within.... To love the mystery of the road.... To love God the traveler.

Dear friends of God, open up to the improbability of the road. Resurrection is to find life on the road amid our fears and sufferings... and to find that our stories are all held in common.... And that our stories are only of a day, a day in which the world is created anew.... Get prepared, move on...leave home... take to the road... and may your hearts burn with the fire of life... and may you live, really live another day to tell about it.