

Easter III Year A

“And then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.”

Last week we talked about the story from John’s gospel of Thomas placing his hand and fingers into the wounds of the risen Christ, and that this story was foremost one of recognition...the moment of re-knowing something one has known before....a rediscovery through recognition of the truth...Perhaps the four most famous stories in the New Testament are the stories of Thomas that we heard last week, the story of the Good Samaritan, the story of the prodigal son....well maybe even five stories if you include the story of the Transfiguration....and then the story we just heard read...the walk to Emmaus.....all five of these stories are stories of recognition....In the story of Thomas it is the recognition of the Christ as the wounded healer, and the recognition that we as the sent ones of Christ are wounded healers as well....The good Samaritan story: the recognition of neighbor... the unlikely answer to the question....who is our neighbor?...the prodigal Son a story of recognizing the lost one from our midst and the ensuing celebrated reconciliation....the Transfiguration a story of recognizing the Christ as true prophet in the line of Moses and Elijah, the Christ who must come down the mountain onto the road of life....and then our story for today, the walk to Emmaus.....the recognition of Christ as the fulfillment of scripture, and just as importantly the recognition of Christ in the stranger whom we welcome and with whom we sojourn in this earthly life.....

The structure of the gospel of Luke is the journey....throughout this gospel Jesus is on his way somewhere....moving on from town to town, moving on ahead.....ultimately headed to Jerusalem....and then in our story today, another road trip, a seven mile or so walk out of town....The journey motif has existed for as long as there has been literature.....The Odyssey... Don Quixote....The Canterbury Tales....Moby Dick....The Grapes of Wrath....Blood Meridian...on and on....there is something archetypal about the journey....something mysterious about being on the road.... Our adrenaline spikes necessarily when we travel on the road...life on the road is provisional, a fluid reality, open to possibility....always different.... dangerous....surprises good and bad along the way....the road changes us... T.S. Eliot puts it this way as he observes travelers boarding a London train.... “Fare forward travelers....you are not the same people who left the station”...It is that in between place...between here and there... the time between the now and not yet....archetypically it is a place of transformation... And it is a place whereupon we must pay attention,

recognize the signs along the way....lest we end up lost....the road, a symbol of life itself.

Two travelers on the road getting out of Jerusalem, the place where Jesus and others were tortured and killed....perhaps they were leaving for safety's sake...and they are joined by a mysterious stranger (except that the writer lets us in on who this stranger is) ... the tension of the story being that the two disciples don't recognize the risen Jesus....they enter into a deep conversation....another phenomenon that happens often while we are on the road....and at dusk as Jesus begins to move on ahead as he has done often in this gospel, the two disciples ask him to join them for supper....and at the breaking of the bread...Luke using Eucharistic language here....Jesus took, blessed, broke, gave, I imagine his wounds visible....a not so subtle sign along the road....and the disciples recognize him, and emboldened, afire, they hurry back to Jerusalem with this earth changing news.

Now stories of recognition are also age old motifs in literature....dust off your Greek mythology here....You remember the end of the Odyssey.... that Odysseus returns to his kingdom of Ithaca after years of a wandering journey following the Trojan War. He returns disguised as a beggar....he is eventually recognized by his old teacher, because of a scar caused by a wound when he was a boy....his nurse next recognizes him...and finally his son and his wife as well....and when he strings his bow at a contest, a bow that could only be strung by the strong Odysseus himself...then all the realm recognize him....and he takes his place as the rightful king come home at last....the order set right once again....would be usurpers thwarted....But it is recognition that completes the action of the story....There are other stories in Greek Mythology about the gods disguising themselves and then being recognized....in Hebrew scripture as well....Joseph disguising himself to his brothers and then the reconciliation that occurs upon their recognizing him....stories of disguise and recognition abound in the literary tradition... in Shakespeare in Mark Twain, in Poe....In his literary critical work *Poetics*, Aristotle puts it this way, "recognition is, as the name indicates, a change from ignorance to knowledge, tending either to affection or enmity; it [recognition] determines the direction of good or ill fortune the fates of the people involved."

I tell you all this to give you some valuable context within which this gospel narrative was written, so that perhaps this intriguing story and other sacred texts might make some sense to us today, beyond some magical fantasy that the church over the millennia has foisted upon us....the Greek academy is the literary ocean within which New Testament literature swims....so this archetype of recognition is certainly not lost on Luke...nor

on the other gospel writers either, because in most every case, you remember, Jesus is at first not recognized by the very people who followed him and loved him...remember the account in John when Mary mistakes the risen Christ for the gardener...and then recognition, and the story turns... recognition...perhaps recognition a powerful cosmic burst of endorphins that literally will alter fate itself.

So what do we make of our story today...two sojourners...two along life's way meet and welcome a stranger...they engage in earnest conversation...they share a meal...and the guest becomes gracious host... and in the midst of this hospitality the way ahead becomes clear as fate would have it....so it is for us, brothers and sisters as we make our way through the midst of life....that we pay attention on the road for the signs... that we welcome the ones given to us....that we practice gracious hospitality ...and we will recognize the one who travels along side us on the road; and we will recognize the very secret of living...a living knowledge that we've known all along....Don't ask me what that is....you already know; it is only for us to recognize it again and again....ours, our very vocation, is to recognize the risen Christ along the way, and thereby we recognize our true selves....and in each moment of recognition the drama of life takes a turn towards its perfection....in each moment of recognition the world is transformed and God's commonweal breaks in, into time and place.

We remind ourselves of this at each Eucharist, It's why we come here....we take, bless, break and give with our own wounded hands....take bless break and give...the very rhythm of the universe.... And in so doing we remind ourselves of who we are and to whom we belong, recognizing ourselves as the ones called out into the road to bear God's hospitality and love to a world that needs nothing more than welcome to know the dignity the risen Christ brings, the way of gracious welcome and compassion in which guests become hosts and hosts become guests....and such recognition will turn the story in which we live towards its true end...And hearts will burn.....hearts will burn....