

Easter 3 “The New normal”

What a strange gospel story we heard today! On the evening of the day Jesus was raised from the dead, two of his followers were walking to another town, when Jesus came alongside of them and asked what they were discussing, the catch being that they didn't recognize Jesus.

So they told him his own story, ending with the rumor that he was alive, after which the risen, incognito Jesus walked them through the entire Old Testament, showing from their own scriptures that this was exactly how it was supposed to happen.

But still they didn't recognize him. When they reached their destination, the two men asked this 'stranger' to stay with them. At dinner, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. And THAT is when their eyes recognized him.

As I said, a perplexing story. Jesus didn't look like Jesus until he went through the familiar meal ritual, and this Jesus can vanish before people's eyes.

In order to understand this story, I need to refer back to 2 sermons I preached in recent weeks. Four weeks ago, the gospel lesson was Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the dead, which I said was not a resurrection story but a resuscitation story, because Lazarus, though restored to life, went on to eventually die again.

Today's story is a resurrection story, because one point that we do not make often enough about resurrection is that a resurrected body is not a simple resuscitation of a corpse, but is the giving of eternal life to an entire person in a different, glorified state. Remember that on Easter morning, while at the tomb, Mary Magdalene mistook the risen Jesus for the gardener. It was when he said her name, “Mary,” that she recognized him.

The risen Jesus was different, not bound by physical laws, sometimes recognizable, sometimes not, but clearly very different than Jesus of Nazareth simply restored to life.

Why is this worth knowing? Because Jesus' resurrection is a promise to us that God intends eternal resurrected life for us all, so that however we understand that, it means that we too will be changed into an eternal state.

Aching backs, migraines, whatever ails us, gone in a second. Inner wounds healed, clarity of vision, forgiveness all around. As was true with those two men, the one thing we can be certain of is that it's going to be different than whatever we expect it to be.

The second sermon I need to refer back to is the one I preached on Maundy Thursday, which was titled “The meal that changed the world” a reference to the Last Supper and the countless suppers which happened before and after that one.

Today’s gospel lesson is the first time after his last supper that Jesus sat with people, blessed and broke the bread, and was revealed to those present “in the breaking of the bread.”

Today’s gospel lesson is an early model of what we try to do every Sunday morning. We take a journey together that includes the study of the scripture and sharing the meal, with Jesus present throughout, and most tangibly so as we take the bread and wine in remembrance of him.

It is no accident that our service is trying to do the same thing in 2011 that his early followers were trying to do: to stay close to Jesus by studying the scriptures and sharing his meal. And so, this gospel lesson is not as perplexing as it seemed at first. It reflects what we might call “the new normal” for those first followers, a hope in the resurrection based on the study of scripture and the sharing of this sacred meal. And in that we are no different from them. We also wonder about what’s going on in our world. We look to the scriptures for guidance, and every Sunday Jesus is revealed to us in the breaking of the bread. Amen.