Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?”

They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Back on February 19th this year, seems like a lifetime ago, a group of about a dozen folks set out on a wilderness adventure. 25 days of river rafting on the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon. They were completely off the grid for over 3 weeks—no cell connection, no internet, no nothing—except the majesty of the Canyon, the songs of its birds, the deep silence of the night sky full of stars.

When they got back to base camp on March 14th, they were met by a guy from the rafting company who had come to pick up their gear. It fell to this guy, Blane, to try and describe to them how the world had changed completely across the course of those 25 days. “You don’t know, do you?” he asked. The leader of the group said of that moment: “he gave us a look, sighed, and launched in.” For a couple minutes, they all hoped it was just a big made up story. After all, the telling of tall tales is a time-honored tradition out on the river. But it soon began to sink in as their cell phones started buzzing frantically, one young woman’s mother telling her daughter to call her immediately when they got back. COVID-19 had totally changed their world and they seemed to be the last to know.

Now you might say that what goes on in the story we hear this morning from Luke’s Gospel is a similar story with the opposite effect. The dejected disciples are close to giving up. They leave Jerusalem to walk to the village called Emmaus, about seven miles away. As they walk along, they’re discussing everything that had happened. And they look sad, the Scripture says. Jesus shows up and walks along with them, but they don’t recognize him. So when he asks what they’re talking about they think he’s crazy. “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who doesn’t know what has happened?...and they tell him all about Jesus, a prophet mighty in word and deed. How they’d hoped he’d be the one to save them, but he had been arrested and crucified. And yes, some of the women in the group had gone to the tomb and seen an angel who told them that he was alive…

At which Jesus surely gave them a look, sighed perhaps and launched in. He reminded them of the scriptures beginning with Moses and the prophets and interpreted for them everything about himself. Still, they couldn’t see. They thought they knew the story, but they couldn’t see the big picture.

He walked on along with them, giving them time to process it all. And when they reached the village, they persuaded him to stay and have some supper with them. And there, at the table, he took the bread, blessed it, and broke it and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him. As he went on his way, they sat there, astonished. Did not our hearts burn within us, they asked one another, when he opened the Scriptures to us on the road?

You see, the river rafters had had a really wonderful experience together but came back to some really bad news. They were the ones who didn’t know how their world had changed. The disciples had had a horrible experience, but walked into some really good news. They were just beginning to grasp how their world had changed, all for the good. Someone they didn’t at first recognize, a stranger, it seems, to shows up and walk along with them that day. And when they arrived at home, they invite that stranger in to have a bite to eat. And as they broke bread together, it suddenly hit them. It was the Risen Lord right there with them. Their eyes were opened to what had been there all along and their hearts were beating like mad. In the walking and the talking and the table fellowship, that stranger became a friend, a very special friend, of course, whose love opened their eyes and restored their hope. Now they could see what love can do! Easter happened to them, for them, right there in the very ordinariness of the walk and the talk and the shared meal.
Even as the Resurrected Christ, Jesus is still a master teacher. He makes extraordinarily ordinary things like walking and talking and sitting at table and sharing bread into the very things that reveal life and truth and hope. The risen Christ walking on the road to Emmaus that day did not glow with light. There was no halo around his head. He looked like an ordinary person. Yet it was through his presence with them and the breaking of bread together that they knew him to be their risen Lord.

As one preacher noted, he didn’t deliver a sermon to them that evening. He sat with them at supper. Not a sermon, but a supper. Now ordinarily extraordinary. Life-giving truth made known to them on the road and in the breaking of the bread. “The Lord has risen indeed,” they told the others. The Lord has risen indeed.

I love the simplicity of this story, the ordinariness…how closely it fits our experience of faith. I love that it’s all so common, so normal—their sadness, their fear, their questions, their wanting to believe, how they’re restored by the simplest acts—someone who walks along with them, someone who sits down at a meal with them, someone who takes them seriously and yet also has something profound to say to them, and so restores their hope.

And now, through our faith in him, we too are changed and converted into living, breathing disciples whose lives show forth his power and his love. To outward appearances, we still look the same as we always have. But now when people meet us, when our path crosses theirs, from a safe distance, of course, we may for them be a stranger, but because we know a risen Savior and live his love, they, too, will experience God’s love for them through us and they will find in us a little bit of life made new.

Ordinary people empowered by Christ to change this world by the power of his love alive in us.

As we worship this day, there’s probably a part of us that feels like those river rafters must have felt. One minute life is wonderful and the next minute we’re still shaking our heads and trying to take in what in the world has happened to our world!

And then there’s another part of us this morning that’s more like those disciples trudging along, dejected, feeling as though everything has already fallen apart. We’re still walking, but we look sad. Like them, we think we know the story but we don’t yet see the big picture.

How do we find the strength to look up, to look around, and see what love can do?

Here are a few pointers from a spiritual director:
• Listen to yourself talk—the out loud talking and the inside your head talking—and if you’ve gotten into bad habits of cynicism or sarcasm or pessimism—turn it off and practice finding the positive and saying it.
• Check out your face—look in the mirror or ask someone you love/trust to check this one for you—is it a picture of worry and fatigue?—SMILE
• Check in with some hope-filled people you know—children, centered folks, joyful folks, singing folks.
• Take care of your mind and body—take a break from stressors. Turn off the news and turn on some music.
• Pray…and pray some more. Rest awhile in the silence and peace.
• Reconnect with the hope that lies within you—and speak of it with others.

And keep walking. We make the road by walking, the very good, good news of the Risen Lord leading us forward, together, the Resurrected Christ sharing our every step.

Right here with us, beside us, teaching us, encouraging us, lifting us up. Opening our hearts and minds to the big picture! This is what love can do!

Christ is Risen! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Alleluia! Amen.

Notes:


John Baxter. Immoveable Feast.

Brian McLaren. We Make the Road by Walking.