

“Their Eyes Were Open”

Sunday, April 6, 2008

Reverend Leah Robberts-Mosser

First Congregational Church
United Church of Christ

*145 Capital Ave., NE
Battle Creek, MI 49017
269-965-1225
www.fcabc.org*

Their Eyes Were Open

Rev. Leah Robberts-Mosser

April 6, 2008

Let us pray. Oh God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be found acceptable in your sight oh God, for you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen

For us it has been two weeks since Easter Sunday but for the people that we meet today in our Gospel lesson it is still the day of resurrection. Who are these people that we meet today?

Don't feel bad if you don't know who Cleopas is. This is the only place in all scripture where he is mentioned. He is not one of the twelve, so he is not mentioned in any of those stories. He is just somebody who saw Jesus, got excited, and followed along. He is just entourage. It is not like Cleopas and the other guy become big church leaders after this. They are not mentioned in Acts or any place after this story. The other guy doesn't even get a name! These are not important people. They are not. They are not somebody special; they could really be anybody. They are nobodys in a way, but because they could be anybody, and this is what is important for today, that means that Cleopas and his friend could be any of us. It could be you or you or you. This story could be about us. And so if that's the case, where are we going today?

Scholars don't really know where Emmaus is. You can look in your bible, at all the maps, and all the footnotes; you can find where Golgatha is and where Mt. of Olives is, Emmaus, not so

much. They don't know where it is. I did some reading this week about Emmaus; a couple of scholars say it is 24 miles Northwest, some say 12 miles, others say it is 7.5 miles Northwest of Jerusalem. The point is that they don't know where Emmaus was. And so, what is important for today is since Emmaus is not tied to a particular place, it means it could be any place. It could be our place, a road that we find ourselves on. And moreover, since Emmaus is not tied to a particular geographical location then it takes on this other meaning; it is not a physical place, it's more of an emotional place.

Frederick Buechner, one of our great theologians, defines Emmaus as an emotional place. He does it so well, I want to read to you his definition verbatim.

“Emmaus is the place we go to in order to escape — a bar, a movie, wherever it is we throw up our hands and say, ‘Let the whole damned thing go hang. It makes no difference anyway’. . . Emmaus may be buying a new suit or a new car or smoking more cigarettes than you really want, or reading a second-rate novel or even writing one. Emmaus may be going to church on Sunday. Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred: that even the wisest and bravest and loveliest decay and die; that even the noblest ideas that men have had — ideas about love and freedom and justice — have always in time been twisted out of shape by selfish people for selfish ends.” That’s what Emmaus is.

Certainly we have all been on the road to Emmaus. Certainly the people in Jerusalem know, without a doubt, what it feels like to have that noble ideal twisted out of shape. The people who are walking on the road to Emmaus had every hope and then with every hit of the hammer on the nail, their hopes were crucified along with Jesus.

All of Jerusalem knows what that feeling is like. Except, apparently, for this guy that they meet on the road. We all know, as the readers, that this guy is Jesus! It's the risen Christ that they are seeing right there in front of their very eyes. But they don't know that, they don't know. It's just some guy that they meet. It could be the person that you meet in line at the grocery store. Or, the person that you are going to stand next to today while you are waiting to be seated for brunch after church. It could be the person who you randomly sit next to at the movies, or the person who you randomly sit next to in church — the person that you rub elbows with at coffee hour— somebody that you meet on the street corner— the person that you sit next to on an airplane. It's just somebody that you meet.

Cleopas and his friend are so shrouded in grief, that this guy can't help but notice. "What's wrong, what is wrong, what has happened?" and they tell him the story. As happens sometimes, when we tell people our stories, they tell us their story right back. Jesus does this most amazing thing. He says to them, in so many words, "I've been there, too. And this is where I met God, in that

place that you are in". He interprets scripture for them in light of their experience.

It may be hard for us to understand what that was really like because of course, we see him as the Risen Christ. But he is not having this conversation with them as the Risen Christ. In this moment, he is not Rabbi, he is not teacher, he is not leader. Again, he's just a guy that they met on the road. They are just three people having a conversation and sharing with each other about life and about faith.

They continue on — it's getting late. Jesus is going to keep going but they say, "No, why don't you stay with us, have dinner". It's then that the guest among them becomes the host. He takes the ordinary bread that they were going to eat for dinner, breaks it and blesses it, and then, their eyes are opened. They see that all along this has really been Jesus that they have been with.

Now sometimes when this story is told, this last part of the story is the only thing that really gets paid attention to. Sometimes people don't even read that first section — they only read the part about the meal. Jesus comes, breaks the bread, their eyes are opened; they see him . . . it's the Risen Christ. But, it would be a problem if we only focused on that part.

This week when I was doing some reading in preparation for today, I ran across a story by Amy Hunter, an Episcopal poet. She talks about an experience she

an Episcopalian and talks about an experience that she had listening to her Priest tell this story. Now, she didn't grow up Episcopalian, she grew up Presbyterian and then became a Episcopalian. Soon after becoming Episcopalian, the Priest preaches this story and says, "The only way that we will meet the Risen Christ is through the breaking of the bread. It is the only place that we encounter God".

Her inner Presbyterian had a little problem with that. It didn't sit well with her. So she went to one of her friends who was a "cradle to grave" Episcopalian, hoping that her friend would unlock some strange Anglican mystery that she really never understood before and explain to her how the Priest was right. But instead, when she told her friend what the Priest had said, her friend got so angry; she was stomping around the kitchen and slamming the kitchen doors; she was just livid. She said, "That's not what it is about! Because if it is only in the bread that we meet the Risen Christ, then the Priest has all the power. It is not the job of the Priest to dole out God to us."

It is not our job to dole out God to you". There are plenty of examples in scripture of the role of the preacher and teacher. I don't want to talk us out of a job today; we just installed you, Tom, we might as well let you do your job for a little while. There are plenty examples in scripture about the role of the Priest, of preacher and teacher. This is not one of those examples; this is a story in which Jesus models something completely different for us. This is regular folks sitting around, talking

about their life and faith together.

Remember, Jesus did not come to them as the Risen Lord. He is just a guy on the road. I have the feeling that if Jesus would have showed up on the road and said “I am the Risen Lord” and broken the bread, they would have looked at him like he was crazy. Because they were so shrouded in their grief, their vision was so clouded by everything that had gone on, that they didn’t have the eyes to see him there. It is only when they were able to share their experience with someone else, and have that person share their experience right back, that this shroud of grief was lifted. It is only then that they were able to get out of the tomb too. It is only then that coming to the ordinary dinner table that it became extraordinary.

It is not like Jesus sat down to share the Eucharist with them. He sat down to eat. Because their eyes had been opened, they were able to see what happened at that table as something completely different, completely different than what it had been before. That is our invitation to the table today. In this story we find out that if we only show up on Sunday mornings to listen to what the Reverend has to say, we are going to miss extraordinary moments with God.

Instead, our invitation today is to pay attention to the person who is in the grocery line with us, and the person who is waiting for brunch with us, and the person who we are sitting next to on the airplane and the person we are sitting next to in the pew, the person who we talk to out in the courtyard. It is our invitation today not to just

talk about the weather, but to share the parts of our lives that matter — to help the scriptures unfold before our very eyes so that when we come to the table, it won't just be a meal. It will be something absolutely extraordinary. That is our invitation today. I hope that we take Jesus up on the offer — to be able to see the face of Christ in each other.

Amen.