

“Traveling to the Table”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

April 23, 2023 - Third Sunday of Easter

[Acts 2:14a, 26-41; Luke 24:13-35](#)

Two travelers journeyed on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. As they began their seven-mile walk, a stranger joined them and heard from them their story about the journey they had already experienced earlier that day. Likely, they would have woken up earlier that morning, if they were able to sleep at all, still saddened by the execution of their group’s leader just two days prior, and they would probably have woken up despairing from seeing their leader killed and their movement killed with him and fearing that the authorities would seek to take their lives as well. When some of the members of their group came and told them that their leader Jesus’ body was no longer in the tomb where it was laid, and that angelic messengers had revealed that Jesus was alive, perhaps they believed this report and began to move from despair, disillusionment, and fear to hope and joy. Or perhaps they found the report that Jesus was alive, while amazing, too good to be true. In either case, they surely had already been on a long and winding emotional journey when the stranger met them on the road to Emmaus.

But the two followers of Jesus welcomed the stranger, who was the unrecognized Christ, to travel with them, and they shared their story with him. And he shared with them an explanation of how the events that they had just experienced were envisioned by their prophets. When they had arrived at Emmaus sometime late in the day, the two disciples kindly invited their traveling companion to stay with them and to continue their conversation and fellowship. As the three began to share a meal together, the eyes of the disciples were opened, and they could see that the stranger who had traveling with them was no stranger at all, but the resurrected Christ. But as soon as their vision was cleared, Jesus disappeared from their sight.

Still, their vision, received only through the fellowship of a meal, led them to faith. They had journeyed away from despair and doubt and into faith and hopeful joy. No longer fearing, their journey continued as they raced back to Jerusalem to the

other followers of Jesus to offer their own report of good news, that Jesus had risen indeed, being revealed to them through their fellowship.

This amazing story of the two travelers' Easter Sunday journey teaches us important lessons about our own journeys and the journey we share as traveling companions on this Sunday of the Easter season.

One lesson is that Christ is revealed in the breaking of bread. When we get together and share meals, especially the holy meal remembering Christ's life, death, and resurrection, and when we share with one another in fellowship the stories of our life journeys, Christ's presence is revealed to us, transforming us, and moving us from fear and disillusionment and doubt to faith and hope and joy.

This is why we have an open Communion table, where all are welcome to come and partake, because we believe that through our own sharing of the broken bread and cup of salvation, we can all have an experience of the risen Christ that can lead us to faith.

Because Christ is revealed in Christian fellowship, we welcome all not only to our table, but to participate in all aspects of the life of our community. We practice an extravagant welcome in response to the extravagant hospitality shown to us by a loving God, following the path of those two hospitable travelers to Emmaus.

And so we offer our own words of welcome, which begin each of our worship services, to let all people know that this is a safe place to be and worship, even if you've been told or felt that you don't belong in a house of worship or to be in fellowship with a community of faith. Our statement of welcome is a declaration of who we are as a hospitable community, but it is also an aspirational statement of what we seek to become. They offer us words that guide us to becoming more welcoming, more hospitable, and so more open to seeing the resurrected Christ revealed through our stranger-welcoming, Christ-welcoming fellowship.

I pray that we can become more welcoming as a church. I pray more fervently that all followers of Christ in this nation, Christians of every tradition and in every state and county, can become more welcoming of those they would prefer to exclude rather than embrace. I hope that a more radical hospitality would be practiced by believers of all kinds and that we could inspire others to see the mind-opening and heart-expanding beauty of inclusivity. I hope that every street

of our nation could look more like Sesame Street and each of its neighborhoods could look more like Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, where people of all kinds belong and welcome each other. I hope that we would stop harming our children and youth by teaching them that some of them are not welcome to exist just as they are or would like to be. And I pray for the opening of eyes and softening of hearts of those who seek to enact laws to restrict and control our transgender and other LGBTQ youth, that lawmakers and those who support them would become sensitized to the great harm they cause whenever communicating to such vulnerable people that they shouldn't exist. I pray that we can become more hospitable to all of our children by surrounding them with a less-violent and less-dangerous society.

May there be peace on earth, and may it begin with me and you and the extravagantly welcoming and hospitable church and communities we form today and tomorrow. Amen.