

Sermon for April 30, 2017 (Pascha 3, Year A)
Offered by Nathan Ferrell at The Episcopal Church of Saint Mary

Texts: Acts 2:14,36-41; Psalm 116; Luke 24:13-35

Title: Stay With Us

Alleluia! Christ is risen. ***The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!***

“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.” (Luke 24:29).

Here we are, my dear friends, two full weeks into these Great Fifty Days. Fully immersed in these days of celebration and rejoicing. These days when we recall how the Lord Jesus continued to live among his friends. Dead, and yet alive again! Still flesh and blood. Still walking down roads. Still talking in normal conversation. Still eating dinner.

Just like an ordinary human. And yet, NOT quite. Not exactly like an ordinary human.

As the resurrected one, Jesus is shown to be fully alive as we are, and yet somehow no longer bound by the same laws that govern the physical universe.

In today’s famous and much loved story from Luke’s Gospel, we hear of two disciples walking west out of Jerusalem on that Sunday afternoon.

We don’t know exactly who they are or where they are going. The Gospel never tells us these details. But it is entirely possible that they were a married couple who were simply walking home together.

And guess what? Along the way, they met a complete stranger.

Now, please notice that these two did not go looking for Jesus! They were not looking for anyone! They were just going home. That’s all.

And HE found them on the road! Although they could not recognize him.

Now, try to imagine that scene for just a moment.

Imagine him just casually walking up beside the two of them and beginning to listen in on their conversation. Eavesdropping is what we usually call this.

Imagine this and ask yourself: what would I have done if I were in their position? They could have very easily perceived this as a rude intrusion on their private conversation.

They could have given him a look that said, “And who do you think you are?” which would have caused any ordinary stranger to pull back a few paces.

And then they could have continued along uninterrupted.

Now, I don't know about you. But, I have to be honest, depending on my mood and what else is going on in my life at that moment, I might very easily have responded like this if I were in their shoes!

I mean, who is this stranger walking right up and butting into my conversation?

We have to assume that these two disciples could have reacted like this...but they didn't! Instead, somehow, in spite of their sadness and confusion and discouragement, they welcomed this total stranger into their conversation.

THIS, my friends, is the first amazing part of today's story!

But it's only the beginning.

On Friday and Saturday, I had the privilege to attend a top-level course in Wilderness First Aid and CPR. It was held up in the Mahoosucs with a clear view to the summit of Old Speck Mountain. Such a beautiful part of our state!

We learned all about how to assess the extent of someone's injuries when you are in circumstances which preclude the possibility of quick professional assistance.

Those circumstances exist along most parts of the Appalachian Trail, and many other areas in Maine, but they can also exist in urban areas or places of civil unrest – basically, anywhere that professional medical resources are not immediately available.

To be sure, there is a lot to learn about the human body. It is amazingly complex and it requires the careful balance of a variety of different internal and external factors. Understanding and evaluating all of these systems requires a lot of knowledge.

But basic first aid is not always that complicated.

One of the primary lessons we learned in this Wilderness First Aid class is that one must never lose sight of the simple basic elements which are nearly always within our control.

Our instructor called these “The Fearsome Five” as a mnemonic tool.

When encountering an injured or unwell person, make sure to remember the Fearsome Five, which are:

1. Fahrenheit – meaning the temperature needed to be comfortable
2. Food and fluids – the basic fuels needed for the body
3. Fatigue – helping them to rest as needed
4. Feet – meaning moving them down from a high elevation, if necessary
5. And Friendship.

Yes, friendship. You may be surprised to hear that this last one was stressed to us as being of primary importance.

Friendship. Friendliness. Basic human kindness.

This ought to be common sense, right? Simple logic?

And yet, in a high pressure, stressful situation, when someone is injured and you are not sure what to do, this is something that is so often forgotten and ignored.

If someone is hurt, they need help to control their normal stress reactions.

Their body will automatically kick into overdrive.

This can lead to anxiety which can seriously exacerbate the situation.

What they desperately need is someone to reassure them, to give them perspective, to speak to them, to tell them what’s happening, to stay beside them and to comfort them.

Of course, there are many other steps that needs to be taken in such situations, but this basic element of human kindness must never be ignored or overlooked.

In today’s Gospel story, many people over the centuries have pointed to this story as a prime example of failure.

The two disciples failed to recognize Jesus as they walked and talked together.

They failed to understand the Torah and the Prophets as they pointed to the future ministry of the Messiah.

They failed to accept the first witnesses to the resurrection.

These two failed. This has been a common interpretation over the years.

But, do you know what I think?

I think that this story is a prime example of success!

I think these two disciples have been thoroughly shaped by the teachings of Jesus.

Did they fail to understand about the resurrection and what it means?

Yes, they did. But who has ever truly understood these things?

On the positive side, can you see what they did successfully?

As they walked along, they welcomed the stranger to walk with them and to talk with them!

As they came to Emmaus, they urged the stranger to stay and eat with them!

They opened their home to an unexpected stranger and broke bread with him!

If these two faithful disciples had left out any of these invitations to the stranger, then they would have missed the risen Lord completely!

As I see it, these two passed the test! They saw the Lord, because they had watched him act and listened to him teach. And they KNEW what it meant to walk the Way with him.

They did not allow their grief or sadness keep them from extending basic human kindness to the stranger.

And because they did that, they saw the Lord!

My friends: the Gospel is inviting us to follow their example. To do what they did!

Now, I cannot promise you that you will experience exactly the same results.

If you welcome the stranger, if you allow the stranger to interrupt your life, to walk with you, to ask you questions; if you allow the stranger to come into your home and break bread with you, I cannot promise that you will have a miraculous experience with Christ.

But I CAN promise you this. Without a doubt, if you ignore the Lord's teachings, if you ignore the way that he lived his life, if you close your heart to the stranger and shut yourself up in your little circle, comfortable and safe and away from others, then I can guarantee you that the Lord will walk right by you and you will miss him!

Simple acts of human kindness can make the difference between life and death in the wilderness. And simple acts of human kindness can make the difference between walking with the Lord or being left behind.

So, my friends, will you keep your heart open? Will you keep your life open? Though different than before, the risen Lord Jesus continues to walk among us and to speak in ways which may surprise us.

By God's grace, may we always walk like these two on the road to Emmaus, welcoming the stranger and meeting the Lord. May it be so. Amen.