

Where is Jesus?
Third Sunday of Easter
April 30, 2017
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Text: Luke 24:13-35

Fear and Anxiety

Confusion and Loss

Grief and despair

Take these six emotions and hold them for a moment if you would.

Our gospel narrative for today picks up immediately where the Easter story leaves off. The women go to the tomb of Jesus and find he is not there. The women encounter two men who claim that Jesus has risen. In other words, Jesus has disappeared, and there is only the word of these women and two angels to go off of. So the word of Jesus' disappearance gets out. I can imagine that the rumors were flying and such a fantastical story was a tough sell for people. Who would believe these women? What a bunch of bologna. So we get to listen in on an exchange between two of Jesus' followers, and get to see how they felt about the rumors of the missing Jesus.

The followers of Jesus were joined by Jesus while they are discussing what has gone on, and are incredulous that this stranger would not know what has happened with this missing Jesus. The followers express how they feel to this stranger by exclaiming all of the events that had happened and how they have now lost hope that Jesus was their Messiah. The followers of Jesus express fear and anxiety, confusion and loss, and grief and despair in their recounting of the events. This mighty prophet was defeated by the political and religious leaders. He was supposed to be the one to raise up Israel! And now it has been 3 days and

he has disappeared! We have heard this incredible story about his being alive, but there is no way that can be true. We saw for ourselves that he is missing, but surely there can be no explanation.

Fear and anxiety.

I have a website that I read daily. I can't tell you what its called, because it is not appropriate, but I do read it daily because it's a compilation of all of the headlines that pop daily. It is my way of staying informed in a world where its hard to know who to trust. And reading headline after headline raises these feelings of fear and anxiety in me. Every time, I read I find myself reacting to something that is shocking and seemingly unreal. It is the experience of the unbelievable news piling up one after the other, and feeling frozen in how to react. Unsure of what it means for what is next. The only response I feel is fear and consternation. Uncertainty and anxiety. My question becomes, what do I do now?

Confusion and loss.

I have been walking through life with a friend who lost his dad very suddenly last year. Now I cannot put myself in his body to know exactly what that felt like, but he and I have done some work around what it was like for him. He describes it as a fallen stomach and a freeze response. And then after a moment, "no no no no no no no no." "How could this happen?" He says he often reverts to anger. "There is no reason this had to happen." So not only is there a hole, a tremendous loss, in his life but there are no answers to offer comfort in the face of this hole that has been created. There is confusion. A loss confounded by confusion. "Why"

Grief and Despair.

When I was in high school, I was a bit of a choir geek. That is where I found the most belonging and where I could be with my friends. It was my favorite part of the day, so I took every opportunity that would allow me to be in choir more. About halfway through my high school career, they created a new advanced women's choir so of course I had to try out. That choir replaced the "regular" choir, so all my friends and I decided we wanted to be in the advanced choir. Well as it turns out, I did not make it. And I had to be in regular choir while all of my other friends were in the advanced. I felt so left out. I was crushed; defeated. My entire identity was wrapped up in being part of that group, and I had to grieve my position there. I had lost all of my hope. I remember thinking if I can't have that, then what do I have?

These are the moments I find us meeting where these disciples are. They are experiencing fear and anxiety because they don't what this means for them or for other believers. Who will save them now? They are experiencing loss and confusion because a good friend of theirs died a violent and horrific death for a crime he didn't commit and that just doesn't make sense. And they are experience grief and despair because they thought Jesus was their Messiah. They have to mourn the idea of their salvation. This is a grim place to be.

But then, these followers encounter the resurrected and embodied Jesus. Jesus comes to them, joins them in their experience of this three-fold grief. And says, look, you are right to be upset. But there is so much more going on here than you realize. And then he begins to share Scripture with them and shows them how this was the plan all along. This was the plan that fulfilled all that they hoped for but in a different way than they expected.

And then Jesus is about to leave, and they ask him to stay and he agrees. And then they break bread together. Jesus gives them the gift of comfort in their

three-fold grief. He reveals answers. He unveils pieces of the plan. He gives them his presence. He gives them himself.

This is a powerful example of how we could be with one another in our fear and anxiety, confusion and loss, and grief and despair.

Ultimately, Jesus was telling his followers that it was his death and resurrection that gave meaning to his life. The ultimate plan of salvation was never better understood by anyone than in this moment.

And then the disciples were excited and ran to tell the story they had heard! They knew the truth about Jesus' resurrection. And ultimately they could bring meaning to his ministry. They could bring comfort. Jesus is alive. That Jesus IS their Savior. If you asked them where Jesus is, they would say in our midst!

As Easter people where would we say Jesus is?

Do we find comfort in the embodied presence of Jesus in the answers about his resurrection?

Do we find hope in the truth of the resurrection amidst our uncertainty?

Do we remember that there is always more going on than we realize?

Do we know, like these followers of Jesus on their way to Emmaus, the meaning of Jesus time of earth?

Do we embody Jesus in the way that we are with people?

What about when we are with ourselves? Do we recall the resurrection truth?

So when I read news headlines that send shock waves through my body, I can respond with come Lord Jesus. Because I know that one day Jesus will come again to make all things new. And that revives bravery.

When I my friend asks God "why" God offers the truth that his father is now united with Christ in his resurrection. And that the ultimate passage for a believer is to be like Christ. And that revives a sense of hope.

And as a young teen, I had to learn that I did not need to lose all hope in who I was as a person because my ultimate identity was in Christ. I was whole because I belonged to Christ. And that revives a sense of purpose.

The encounter with Jesus on the journey to Emmaus reveals the uniqueness of God's plan for humanity. As Easter people, we know that we do not yet have all the answers. It also reminds us that Jesus is our comfort in uncertainty. Jesus comes alongside of us no matter what our grief looks like, stays with us. The answer to "where is Jesus?" is still "in our midst". Jesus is among us, and that should offer us great comfort and a great charge to move forward.