

April 23, 2023  
Luke 24:13-27  
Luke 24:28-35

## We Have Seen the Lord

During this season of Easter, we are sharing times we have seen the Lord. Because Easter can happen to us at any time. It's not just a story about something long ago and far away. We meet the Lord even now.

Meeting him unexpectedly and in the strangest of places. We might not recognize him at first. But then, suddenly, it dawns on us. Our eyes are opened, and we realize this is Jesus, revealed to us.

In the gospel of Luke today, we heard the story of some disciples traveling to Emmaus. As they walk along, a stranger joins them and asks what they are discussing. And they begin to tell him about Jesus whom they have just lost. Who was crucified and suffered unimaginably. They say they have heard rumors from their womenfolk that he isn't dead; he is alive again. But the rumors seem too impossible to believe. The stranger, strangely enough, begins to challenge them. He explains the scriptures and how they pointed to all of this. How the prophets foretold it. How the Son of God would suffer and die and rise again. That none of this was an accident. It was God's plan all along. To teach us that life is

larger than death, that we must surrender and let go of what we are holding, in order to be held by God.

The disciples don't really understand all that this fellow is saying to them. But they like him. So they invite him to stay with them where they are stopping for the night. And when they sit down to share a meal together, he breaks the bread and gives it to them. As if he is the host. As if this is his table. And they recognize him suddenly. And just as suddenly he disappears. They know now why their hearts had been burning within them all this time.

The Spirit of Jesus is among us. But we don't always recognize it. We don't expect it. We aren't looking for Jesus. We are too distracted by life. By worry and fear about the future. We are too anxious about our possessions and obligations. Too busy trying to achieve worldly success and personal victory. Too focused on what is perishable to see what is imperishable. Trying too hard to hold on to everything see Jesus is teaching us to let go. To see that his path to new life goes through suffering and death. That we have to learn to let go of what we think we need or deserve or have to have.

After I graduated college, I went to Belfast Northern Ireland for a year of service as a Young Adult Volunteer for the PCUSA. I worked in a Presbyterian church and at a community center in a Catholic neighborhood and at a YMCA camp in the Mourne mountains. If you think people are divided here in our country now, you should have seen Northern Ireland in the late 1990s. People hated each other because of their religion, their neighborhood, their soccer team, their clothing, their accent. There was always a reason to hate someone. And the whole world was defined by who you were opposed to. While I was there, the government made a significant compromise, called the Good Friday Agreement. It was remarkable because in the midst of all the fighting, opposing political groups made a promise to work together. Well, it wasn't easy. Those who signed the agreement suffered abuse. They were called weak and spineless. They were traitors to their side. People didn't know hope when they saw it. It was too unbelievable. Their hearts were so brittle by decades of violence and discrimination.

The church that I worked at in Belfast had a partnership with a Catholic church in town. They shared a youth group. And once a month they

would gather for evening worship. Usually it was song and scripture and prayer. But at one service, they decided together to offer communion. It felt strange at first between Catholics and Protestants. As people passed the bread and wine, it got very emotional. The Catholic priest, Father Jerry, who was dedicated and kind, was weeping. He wanted to share in this so badly, but he couldn't. His bishop wouldn't allow it. I remember in that space feeling the powerful presence of Jesus. Because all of us were trying. We were longing for something beyond ourselves. All of us, imperfect and stubborn and powerless. All of us, in our great mess of humanity. Jesus was there with us, inviting us to let go and rest in him. The disciples, I imagine, were just as messy. Their 1<sup>st</sup> century world of habits and cultures. Thinking that God was about power and might. Disappointed that God's Messiah had failed. Sad that he had not taken over and fixed the world. Instead the world had fixed him. And made him suffer. It made him die. But his life was bigger than all of that. Through death, God brought new life. And as Jesus breaks bread with these disciples, they realize that God has not left them. God is with them. They are not alone. None of this was a mistake. When they let go

of how they thought things would be, they see how things truly are.

Their eyes are opened. They recognize Jesus. The one who has saved them. He has saved them from cycles of hatred and division and revenge. Calling us to let go. To give up. To trust that God is in all things and through all things. To come and follow him and share the news that we have seen the Lord.