

Palisades Presbyterian Church  
Easter Sunday 10:00 A.M. Worship

Can it really be so?  
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Can it really be so?

Emmaus. One of my favorite of Luke's writings. It so describes me, at times. Caught up, consumed, hyper-focused on getting things done or my own mind, seemingly operating of its own accord, determined to wrestle some irresolvable condition or situation – to the unreachable finish, obscuring everything – and, unfortunately, sometimes – everyone around me. It gets like that sometimes.

But, I am not alone in such things.

Two disciples, one named Cleopas, the other unnamed are so absorbed, shocked, stunned, overwhelmed by the events of the last two days that they do not even realize that Jesus was walking beside them. Can you imagine that! Ever happen to you?

And strangers. Again the importance of treating strangers well...

Jesus, to them, was a stranger. And the hospitality code was clear, you welcome strangers. So when their journey came close to its end, they insisted that Jesus stay and sup with them, because it was late, and when Jesus later broke the bread at the meal, their eyes were opened, they recognized him, and then he vanished.

How much of things, how often are things of importance fleeting, a moment of clarity, revelation, or peace? Then suddenly – gone. As if physical limitations restrict us from more. Still, as short as such events may be, they can be life altering.

And the sense, the undeniable, indefinable sense that something is afoot, elusive, and just outside our grasp. We've know that, too. We call it a hunch, intuition....

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking with us on the road?"  
We knew something was up!

Try this, for a moment – don't think – just let whatever is on fire, or maybe smoldering to rise to your mind. What's on fire in your heart?

[Pause]

I'll bet that in that instant, out of nowhere and somewhere at once, for most of us – an immediate something came into your mind's eye."

Did you hear it, "Oh, yes, I've got to do this," or "I have to do that," "I've got company coming and have to get home and..." or "Tomorrow's the first day of school and I don't have my lessons done..."

For many of us, in that moment, our thoughts turned to loved ones, the surrounding community, county, state, country, other countries, hemisphere, world, universe...

It is the way of us humans to constantly be engaged in these inner narrative of our lives, yet even so, even in the exceptional and hyperactivity of the mind – the Other – the stranger, the yearning, perhaps, slips in – a pull toward resolution of some kind, maybe a desire for a more assured sense of the eternal in our present lives.

Easter transcends the stem of our lives into the spiritual blossom, like those that top these lilies. God suddenly blooms all around us. It becomes evidence of our spiritual nature revealing itself.

Paul Tillich in his book The Eternal Now states that this work of the Spiritual Presence in us reaches its height when it liberates us from the yoke of the commandments to the freedom of the Spirit. Suddenly, we know life to be great and holy, deep and abundant, ecstatic and sober, limited and distorted by time, fulfilled by eternity.

An eternity, I think, that become more present as we mature in our spiritual live.

Could it be that this was the Jesus that walked with the disciples on that dusty road, Jesus – the eternal in the present: the realm of God at hand, now?

I think so. I think this is the Easter - the Jesus that became liberated in the transformation from the limitations of known physics, to a total transformation of presence. This is Jesus, I think, a dynamic quantum presence, in that he – or God as you understand God – is not only present in all the particles of "the know we know" but is the information of that particles that inform all there is so that it can be known.

If that sounds a little circular, well it is. It's a parallel to the evolutionary theory that goes just so far until you try to understand who or what created that which began the evolutionary process that began it all, so to speak.

It's what always got me into trouble in grammar school.

Easter then, in a way, can be thought of as this kind of resurrected saturated presence, into which Jesus invites, not as a confining submission, but as particles of creation that cannot truly know such things until we are connected, transformed.

Tillich underscores that such growth into the spiritual is not based on conformity, but on transformation. Further he points out in the same book that, "the conformism that threatened Jesus most effectively and brought him to death was the religious conformism of his time. And the situation was and is not different in the church. (Meaning, today) Dare to be not conformed to this eon, but transform it courageously first in yourselves, then in your world -- in the spirit and the power of love."

We do that here. I've seen it time and again!

A couple of days ago I was watching a show that was investigating the Shroud of Turin: another investigation of this famous and mysterious shroud that some believe has upon it the image of Jesus, believing that it was the same piece of material in which he was wrapped. I was about to change the channel, having followed the shroud mystery from a distance for a while and then figuring it was all over when the carbon dating of the material placed it somewhere around the 14<sup>th</sup> century, suggesting, it seemed, that it was a clever forgery.

However, they suggested that in the death of this man there were other forces at work, new forces that since then have been released into our world – a new generation. Forces not responsive to such things as carbon dating.

Whether that is so or not, I have no idea. Sounded a little too far out, even for me – but, on the level of a new force being released into this world by the teaching, life, death, and resurrection of this man and his spirit – that's hard to deny. Again, just look around.

We spend a lot of time on hermeneutics that is exploring the Scriptures through exegetical techniques such as historical and contextual analysis of the writings. In many cases, it might be easy to say, "See! I told you it never happened this way. This proves it!" And, in fact, sometimes that is true, however to extend such studies and revelations to the conclusion that the entire Bible is "bunk" waiting to be "debunked" – goes a bit too far. The study of the Bible first reveals that it was never written to be a history, as we understand history, but a record of God's interaction with the human race and humanity's interaction with God..

Could it be, then, that what is written is "true" in the sense that it requires transformation to grasp its meaning, rather than just conformity or literary deconstructive devices?

Could it be that it is the exhortation to conformity that is limiting us from transformation and “truth”?

Tillich says that the decisive step to spiritual maturity is risking the break away from spiritual infancy with its protective traditions and guiding authorities. Without a “no” to authority, there is no maturity.

I think it is true that the move from spiritual infancy to maturity requires tossing away the prosthetics of conformity, something that clearly frightens and challenges many. Until we embark on such a commitment, however, we are stuck in relying upon traditions and directives that were never meant to be the final destination. If Jesus, for one, did not make that clear to us – it may be that we’re missing the key to Easter.

In today’s lovely lily arrangement that came out of the hearts and hands of Frances and Anna, and in the creation and care of the donations and dedications managed with care by Mary Ann – we remember those who have gone ahead of us into the full transformation that awaits us all. Please, when you have time read all the names. The remembrances are ways of calling those who are not with us into sound, sight, and being – and by doing that – we affirm the mature spiritual faith that moves Jesus from icon to life and presence and our loved ones into that same space – with him.

It all somehow becomes one –time and space – for a moment are suspended and we know the abiding peace that our loved ones enjoy in their resurrection. We can be enormously happy and thrilled for them, even in the same moment feeling the pain of living without them here, physically, in the best of ways we remember.

It’s that tension that Jesus entered and from which Jesus transformationally emerged. Easter, in the end, may be less about Jesus being risen and our rising to Jesus in a transformational way in our own lives.

We walk, my sisters and brothers, we walk with the stranger Jesus around us all the time.

So, lift up your hearts, not to feel better – but to touch the present eternal and lean forward into what is a slow, but necessary transformation – into the place we call mystery. And let us be grateful, with prayers and thoughts of thanksgiving, for as Tillich also says, “Thanksgiving consecrates everything created by God. It transfers something that belongs to the secular world into the sphere of the holy.”

Remember what Paul said in today’s first reading: “Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?”

Can it really be so? Can the smallest of loving gestures be the path to Easter and transformation?

Yes, it can, I know – because I have felt it here time and again from all of you. It is true, you, we are the Easter people! And, that is exceptionally good news.

Happy Transformation!

Happy Easter!

Amen.