

Year A Easter 3 And Their Eyes Were Opened Luke 24 vv13 to 35

Life is full of disappointments. Small disappointments like not finding the right kind of cold beverage waiting for you in your fridge on a hot day. Huge disappointments like not getting the job you wanted, a friend moving away, the doctor telling you surgery is not an option.

These two disciples walking from Jerusalem toward Emmaus were in the midst of experiencing a huge disappointment. They had pinned their hopes on this Jesus of Nazareth, their hopes for an end to Roman occupation of their land, their hopes for Israel's rise in power, wealth flowing into their country...but now this Jesus was dead. This so-called Messiah had been crucified by the people of power and what good is a dead Messiah? Absolutely none. A dead Messiah is a useless Messiah.

"We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel," they say to Jesus. Except, they don't realize that it is Jesus. They do not recognize the famous teacher and mighty prophet as the one who is walking alongside them. How is it possible that they did not recognize Jesus as he walked so close to them? Luke writes that their eyes were kept from recognizing him. This often leads us to simply think that God somehow was keeping them from recognizing Jesus but why would God do something like that? Perhaps it is more likely that their own misguided expectations of the Messiah were preventing them from recognizing him. They weren't looking for someone like Jesus – Jesus was someone who was clearly powerful in the sense that he healed the sick, cast out demons, walked on water but he was someone weak enough to die on a cross at the hands of the world's powerful leaders. One gets the sense in this passage that the disciples were so wrapped up in their grief and disappointment that they weren't really looking at Jesus anyway.

Expectations for something supposedly better than we we've got can and do keep us from seeing the treasure that we do have. One thing that the Church consistently gets wrong is to think of ourselves according to the world's thinking. When we measure ourselves against the expectations set for us by the world's definition of power and success, we will see only failure and experience only hopelessness. For example, I hear the lament that we are lacking in youth and this means we are somehow failing as church. We had a very good turnout for our Easter worship services and just over a fifth of those attending was youth. Half of those are regular parishioners. Expectations for something supposedly better can keep us from seeing the treasure that we do have.

The disciples we meet in today's story were measuring Jesus as Messiah against the expectations of a Messiah set up by the world's definition of power and success...military strength to overthrow the Romans, wealth and prosperity flowing into their country, the admiration and subservience of all the other countries around them. They measured Jesus against these expectations and they saw only failure, they experienced only hopelessness.

Jesus came alongside them and set about opening their eyes to the treasure they have. What Jesus was doing was taking their misinterpretation, their expectations that had been more greatly dictated by the world than by God's word and he was realigning them, reframing them according to God's purpose. I say this often because it is crucial to our identity as the body of Christ: God's purpose is to reconcile all things to God and to each other – love for God, love for self and others, love for the world. God's purpose can never, will never be fulfilled when

framed through the lens of success according to a world and humanity not holding God at the centre of their lives.

Although Luke does not provide the lengthy narrative of all that Jesus spoke to them about, we know that Jesus' words come from the Scriptures – the same words available to us, the same words we frame through the lens of a world and humanity not holding God at the centre of their lives. Because of this, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we may not recognize Jesus when he walks alongside us. We must realign and reframe our purpose, the purpose we share with God, to view this purpose from a God-centred existence, with a God-centred idea of success.

This is extraordinarily difficult to achieve since our thinking is very much aligned with the world's thinking – thinking measured by external qualities and achievements. A businessman and a homeless man stand side by side. Who do you point to when asked, "Who is the successful person?" "Successful" according to God's purpose would be difficult to discern unless we knew them. Successful according to the non-God-centred world...the businessman, of course. We carry this thinking within us. It travels with us into our worship service and determines our opinion of ourselves as successful and unsuccessful as the Church.

Numbers are what we turn to in order to measure success. Number of people, number of youth, number of dollars. Our thinking leads us to believe that we must increase numbers to be successful. In his book, *Re-membering God*, Tobias Stanislas Haller writes:

There will always be the temptation to jump on the bandwagon of success that some of the nondenominational megachurches appear to

have in shaping their worship spaces to meet the needs of generations raised with short attention spans. The question is, will this in the end produce a lasting congregation of mission-gearred members or a transient audience of satisfied customers? We [Anglicans] are fortunate to have not only a finger on the pulse of the modern word, and the capacity to look to the future, but a rich tradition that reaches back centuries and includes many cultures. This is a great tradition that many parishes have drawn on, recovering the deep spiritual nourishment in ancient practices of prayer and worship. They have found – ironically enough – that Generations X, Y, and so on are hungry for food that will sustain them on the journey, rather than a snack, and are seeking direction for their lives rather than mere diversion for the moment. (p.96)

Shane Hipps puts it a different way: While other churches may offer up the eye-catching, mouth-watering cotton candy, we provide the broccoli that nourishes and sustains (in *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture*). Jesus is outlining for the disciples and for us, the broccoli. The cotton candy of the world's measurement of success is incompatible with God's purpose – our shared purpose – for the world. The disciples can feel the truth of this...their hearts burn within them as Jesus speaks with them. The critical moment when they finally, truly, fully “get it” is when they share a meal with Jesus.

Meals are huge in Luke's Gospel, in all of the Gospels, in the whole of the Bible, as a matter of fact. Meals are where we find the abundant love and generosity of God...in the wedding at Cana where Jesus provides an abundance of the best wine...in the feeding of the 5000 where everyone has enough...in God's feast on the mountaintop in the fullness of God's kingdom when people are completely at peace with one another. And, of course, in the meal shared with his disciples

before his death when Jesus promises that God's purpose will be fulfilled, he will be present with us, he will accomplish complete reconciliation.

God's purpose – complete reconciliation – cannot be achieved without relationship. We are shown time and again, that relationship is built and maintained over meals. Jesus shows us that it is not sufficient to give bread to others but to share bread with others. It is in sharing bread, spending time over a meal, that people come to know and to care for each other. It is in the fellowship of sharing food that we also share stories...I love to hear your stories over tea or coffee – stories that tell us more about each other...where we come from, what we've done, what we want to do, and so on.

Each week we gather for the most important meal – the meal we share with God at God's table. It is here that Jesus shares with us, as he did on the road to Emmaus, his stories of what he has done and what he will do. It is in sharing this meal that we get to know God better, God who is present with us. It is here that Jesus does for us what he did for the disciples – realigns and reframes our lives according to God's expectations. As we come to know God better, we know better God's way of love and care. This is an ongoing, difficult process of transformation. We are shaped and formed at this meal with God so that we are more and more able to carry that thinking with us, travel with God-centred thinking of success back into the world to transform the world.

“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.” Our liturgy, explains Tobias Stanislas Haller, “is the ‘working’ of God in us to God's own glory” (p.8). In our worship, we experience powerful symbolic actions and sounds

that bring us into God's presence, in God's kingdom, to think on God. Haller says of this, that contemplation – thinking on God – “is the liturgy of heaven. Because there is always more to God than meets the eye, even the eye of faith, we will never be bored with God. The Trinity has been doing that inward dynamic dance of...God simply being who God is in uncontainable joy and love, from before time and forever. And we are invited, plucked from our wallflower seats to join that dance, to contemplate and participate in that divine energy, that love that drives the sun and the other stars. That is what we do wherever, together, we gather” (p.26).

Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Let us bring that dance into the world.