

The Road to Emmaus...

*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*

“Revelation is the clue that enables one to put together the disparate experiences of life into a meaningful coherent whole, to see a pattern and purpose in human history.” and so to “overcome the incongruities between what life is like and life ought to be.”

Surely for Cleopas and the other disciple, who I’d like to point out could well have been a woman. Nowhere does it say the other disciple was a man. What are the assumptions we made about these two? Did we figure they were both men? I wonder why we would think that? Just saying...

So here are these two disciples, who have indeed had disparate experiences over the past week. Who are indeed feeling that what they expected, their dream of how life ought to be, *would* be, with Jesus as their leader, has been completely shattered. So not only are they in deep grief at the death of their beloved friend and leader, Jesus... They are also grieving the loss of a dream that was central to their lives. And... they are also utterly confused at these reports of the empty tomb, visitations from angels, and claims that Jesus is alive after all. They are overwhelmed with the strangeness of it all. This wasn’t how they imagined things would turn out. And then... we know what happened next. Slowly, gradually the information builds up as Jesus teaches them. And then suddenly, in the most ordinary of gestures – breaking the bread – they KNOW who is with them. And everything falls into place. It all becomes a meaning-full, coherent whole. They see the pattern and purpose not only for the world, but for themselves. For their own lives.

So is it kind of like what’s happened here for us? What if... coming to the place on the road where the Bishop decides this parish cannot continue with a full time priest at the present level of financial support, what if... the Bishop making that decision is a potential moment of transformation. What if we are asked to step beyond our usual ways of perceiving things and open our hearts to the Spirit at work among us. What if we asked to SEE Jesus walking beside us as we yearn towards Emmaus – in other words, yearned towards our old life as a church, our predictable, familiar, historical way of being church... what if Jesus is walking beside us and calling us to a new way of being church, one that is viable and nourishing, life-giving and transformative a way for the twenty-first century... And what if Jesus is calling us to see how it can be nourishing, life-giving and transformative not just for us but for everyone. For strangers. For people who’ve never imagined church could be meaningful to them in any way. For people who believe we are still the same church as we’ve been over the past several hundred years.... What if it’s our Creator, what if it’s Christ, what if it’s the Holy Spirit... calling out our names, all our names, through the voice of our Bishop...

What if God is acting through Bishop Anna to lead us onto a new path. An unfamiliar path AND a life-giving path. Is there anyone here who does not believe that Bishop Anna prayed long and hard over this decision? Is there anyone here who doubts that she was listening as faithfully as

she possibly could, with every cell of her being to hear God's guidance? And should we then doubt her capacity to be a messenger to us from God's own self? Are we so sure of ourselves that we are only capable of believing the way we've always done things is the only way forward? Do we reject the possibility that God is showing us a new thing? Does that term sound familiar? Remember Isaiah?

*"Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it?
I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."*

And in case you don't remember the context of those words, they are spoken to the Israelites when they complain about how hard life is in the desert and that they'd rather go back into slavery under the Egyptians. How about us? Have we been living in slavery? We might not think so BUT is it possible God does? Is it possible God sees that we've been enchained to old ways of being and doing church, the ways we've used for the past many, many generations? Can you conceive that God might be calling us to find a new and different way for our future, a life-giving, world-mending, society-transforming way?

I believe God wants to free us from a kind of slavery to tradition, to the familiar, to what has become puny and stingy in the face of 21st century needs. This morning we sang these words in the psalm:

*O Lord, you have freed me from my bonds.
I will offer you the sacrifice of thanksgiving*

Or in the words of another more contemporary translation:

*O Beloved, consider me your friend...
for you have loosed the bonds of fear in me
I will offer to you the gift of gratitude
and acknowledge your Loving Presence with joy.*

Maybe it's our time for a little joy, for some gratitude, for willingness to embrace a new thing with everything we've got. What do you think?

Amen.