

Rev. Denise Muller  
St. Luke's Episcopal Church  
Easter 3A

This past week a friend shared with me a story. During World War II, C.S. Lewis hosted a weekly radio show. One day, when London was being bombed, he said the following:

*Satan says: "I will cause anxiety, fear, and panic. I will shut down businesses, schools, places of worship and sporting events. I will cause economic turmoil."*

*Jesus responds: "I will bring together neighbors, restore families. I will bring dinner back to the kitchen table, I will help people slow down their lives and appreciate what really matters. I will teach my children to rely on me and not the world, I will teach my children to trust me and not their money and material resources."*

Like the people of London in 1942, we are facing a crisis in our communities and on a global level. Many of us are concerned about indefinitely closing businesses, schools, and the buildings where we gather for worship.

As stay-at-home orders are extended in various parts of the country, as public health experts warn of a second and more dire wave of infections later this year, and as arguments arise pitting "reopening the economy" against "flattening the curve," feelings of anxiety and fear are mounting for many people. But that's not the whole story.

Many of us are spending more time appreciating what matters to us... checking in with people we care about, expressing our love and gratitude for one another. In talking over the phone with parishioners, family members, and colleagues these past few weeks, I've heard many stories about how they're in more frequent contact with loved ones, getting out for walks amid the lovely spring weather, and finding unexpected blessings in simply slowing down and appreciating the "ordinary" stuff of life.

This isn't to say they're not nervous or concerned. When little, if anything, seems "normal" anymore, many of us are wondering what the "new normal" will be.

I wonder if, after Jesus was crucified, the disciples were concerned about what their "new normal" would be. They had anticipated life going in a certain direction with Jesus as their leader. And then all of a sudden, everything changed. Their beloved rabbi and friend was arrested, sentenced to death, and executed by agents of a corrupt system. In the space of a few days, their entire world had fallen apart. Everything they'd been working toward had been put on pause.

Many of them hid full of fear behind locked doors. Others left Jerusalem, dejected and unsure what to do next. Although there were reports of an empty tomb and a visitation by angels, these two disciples walking to Emmaus had lost all hope. The story they were telling themselves was that both Jesus and his ministry had come to an

unexpected and tragic end. And even more, they were shocked to meet someone who apparently hadn't heard about any of these events. But at that point, they didn't know the whole story.

As this stranger drew alongside them, their eyes were kept from recognizing him as Jesus. They simply shared with him the story that they knew. The story of Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all people, being handed over by the chief priests to the civil authorities and being crucified. And yet they also relate a strange continuation of that story. Apparently some women in their group had gone to the tomb, found it empty, and seen visions of angels who said that Jesus was alive. But that extra bit didn't bring them hope. They remained confused and fearful.

These two disciples think this man they're talking to doesn't know what's happened in Jerusalem, but he actually knows more of the story than they do. They don't realize that the resurrection has happened. That Jesus' death has been transformed into new life. That the risen Christ is right beside them. Jesus responds to their story by explaining to them the scriptures. The law and the prophets. That the Messiah's path to glory includes suffering. That suffering, death, and renewed life are each a part of the whole, glorious story.

Being faithful Jews, the disciples extend hospitality to this supposed stranger when they reach their destination, inviting him to stay with them rather than journey on alone. As they sit around a table to share a meal, Jesus, presumably the guest, assumes the role of host. He takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and shares it. And suddenly their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And they also recognized how he had been with them all along. *"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us?"*

The author of Luke's gospel wants his listeners to know and recognize the living Word in their midst, through the breaking of bread, just as these two disciples had recognized Christ along the Emmaus way. Perhaps the author had noticed how common it is for people to not recognize the Holy surrounding them. Particularly when people feel confused or fearful, they need to hear stories from other people who had also been confused and fearful, and yet were awakened to the presence of Christ around them.

Even though these two disciples' encounter with the living Word is relatively brief, lasting perhaps just a few hours, the experience changes them. Their hope is no longer dependent on life's circumstances. Their hope is newly and powerfully grounded in the living presence of God. They learned that there was more to the story of what happened in Jerusalem than just Jesus' death. And they went forth to share with their fellow disciples that fuller story, a story that encompasses despair and hope, anxiety and relief, loneliness and community, death and new life.

*Satan says: "I will cause anxiety, fear, and panic. I will shut down businesses, schools, places of worship and sporting events. I will cause economic turmoil."*

But the story didn't stop there during World War II. And it doesn't stop there in 2020. The story continues.

*Jesus responds: "I will bring together neighbors, restore families. I will bring dinner back to the kitchen table, I will help people slow down their lives and appreciate what really matters. I will teach my children to rely on me and not the world, I will teach my children to trust me and not their money and material resources."*

As you reflect on the world today, where do you see the story of Christ continuing? Are there ways in which we've become stuck in anxiety, despair, and fear? Are there ways in which doubt, or even denial, has clouded our vision? Are there ways we're being invited to see the presence of Christ anew? How might God be bringing new hope into our lives by opening our eyes to the presence of Christ?

As in the story that C.S. Lewis told, may our lives slow down in a way that we appreciate what truly matters. As in the story of the Emmaus way, may our eyes be opened that we truly see Christ's presence around us. Even in the midst of a pandemic, may our hearts be kindled by a sure and certain hope in the new life, the ongoing story, that Christ desires to reveal in our lives. AMEN.