

April 19, 2026 - Trinity Episcopal Church - Third Sunday of Easter

Rev. Elizabeth Molitors

“Now on that same day...”

Luke 24:13a

Let’s hear again the way today’s gospel passage begins: “Now on that same day,” it says.

What same day? Where are we in our Easter storyline? Some context and grounding might be helpful, especially since we’ve been reading from different gospels over the past few weeks—describing the same basic events, of course, but from slightly different points of view.

Today, we hear a story from Luke’s gospel, from the 24th chapter, which is also that gospel’s *last* chapter. And while chapter 24 covers a lot of ground in terms of characters and stories, everything mentioned there takes place all on one and the same day.

On the first day of the week, it says in the chapter’s first verse, the women—Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James—they go with spices to the tomb, to attend to Jesus’ lifeless body. They have an encounter with a pair of angels

who tell them that Jesus has risen, then they come back and tell the others about the empty tomb and all the rest of it.

Just after hearing the women's story, Peter goes to check out the tomb himself, unable to take them at their word.

And now on that same day, two of Jesus' disciples are walking to the town of Emmaus—a journey they never complete—and they end up making their way back to Jerusalem that same day, to tell the others that they'd seen and talked to and broken bread with the risen Jesus.

Also that same day, the 11 disciples (the original gang minus Judas) are gathered together in Jerusalem, and together they hear from the Emmaus contingent. And while they're still processing that information, Jesus appears to all of them. They're startled and frightened and think Jesus is a ghost—they don't see him for who he really is—so he shows them the wounds on his hands and feet, and then eats a piece of fish, to convince them that he is real, tangible, embodied.

All these people—the women, Peter, the others of the original disciple gang, the two folks walking to Emmaus—all these people have slightly different experiences, but there are some common

threads, common emotions. Fear is a big throughline. Uncertainty and doubt abound. There's also plenty of sadness and heartbreak, disappointment and disillusionment, which we hear, especially, from the pair walking to Emmaus, when they tell the stranger—who's-really-Jesus that "they had hoped" that things would turn out differently. They had hoped that Jesus would right all the world's wrongs, overthrow the Roman occupiers, make all pain and insufficiency go away. They had hoped their rabbi, leader, and friend would escape his death sentence.

They had hoped, but when reality failed to meet their expectations, their heart sickness, grief, and disappointment blinded them to the hope, the joy, the resurrection that was standing right there in front of them, in the person of Jesus.

Eventually, though, their "eyes were opened."

I love that in this Road to Emmaus story, it's not Jesus' physical presence or appearance that opens the disciples' eyes, nor does Jesus explaining and teaching the scriptures to them do much of anything to jump-start their recognition. It's in the simple, ordinary act of mutual hospitality—the disciples asking the stranger to stay with them, and Jesus acting as host to break

and share bread—that they are transformed from despair to hope, from fearful to free, from death to life. A moment of joy.

The author, Kate Bowler, who just published a new book about joy writes that, “experiencing joy does not depend on everything getting better. Joy isn’t something you can optimize or manufacture; it finds us at the edge of expectation, where life interrupts our scripts. Joy reminds us that, no matter what, life is still worth loving. For every time we ask, *Is this it?*, joy will answer: *There is more.*” [from dust jacket, *Joyful Anyway*]

Besides whatever hardships or griefs we might be facing personally, collectively we certainly have a whole lot to be heartsick about these days: chaos, wars, instability, erratic and heartless leadership, growing economic disparity; threats against the gains made over the past 60+ years toward racial and gender and lgbtq+ equality, women’s bodily autonomy, voting rights, and environmental care. Billions are spent to round up and detain immigrants without benefit of due process, while programs to feed and educate and protect the most vulnerable in our society go un-funded. And on and on.

We had hoped. We had hoped for better. And in the midst of this grief for what might have been and what could be, it can be

hard to see even glimpses of resurrection and joy. Yet the experience of our spiritual ancestors on the road to Emmaus should push us to persist.

As the poet, Jack Gilbert, puts it, *We must have the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world. To make injustice the only measure of our attention is to praise the Devil. ... We must admit there will be music despite everything.* [Jack Gilbert, *A Brief for the Defense*]

Joy can be elusive, coming at us in unexpected forms and guises, such that we don't recognize it right away. And so I've been consciously on the lookout for it...

During my time away last week, visiting Saguaro and Grand Canyon national parks, and the red rocks of Sedona, I thought about the many interactions we had with park employees and volunteers, who were not only professional, but also kind and enthusiastic in sharing useful information about the beautiful natural wonders where they worked. I know that the parks are struggling with insufficient staffing and budget cutbacks, which might prompt cynicism and despair from those shouldering a heavier-than-usual load. But joy answered, *"there is more."*

I thought about how when we were hiking down—then up—the steep Bright Angel trail at the Grand Canyon, how hikers so often offered words of encouragement to one another about how much farther to the rest house at the trail’s base, or how much longer to climb back to the rim. There was a sense of shared humanity, with everyone facing the same challenging climb, the same thin air, enjoying the same stunning views. More joy.

I thought about the joy and excitement I felt watching the launch of the Artemis 2 mission at the beginning of April. While waiting for the countdown to begin, a reporter at the launch site asked a group of spectators to introduce themselves. They were all somehow involved in the Artemis project, from NASA sites across the country: scientists and mathematicians and computer specialists and dieticians and marketing people and so on. I was delighted to learn about one of the jobs of a technician named Pamela Cain, who sewed what looks like a little plush toy—named “Rise”—which functioned in the capsule as a zero-gravity indicator.

Although the four astronauts who went into space were the most visible to us, for the project to work, all these individuals in this complex, interconnected body had to each be doing their thing well—not competitively, but cooperatively. And to see that

spirit of working together was such a powerful, joyful antidote against all the garbage messaging going on in the world. A triumph of abundance and love over scarcity and hate.

We had hoped, the disciples on the road sighed with disappointment to the Jesus they didn't recognize. And even though we know the end of the story, about the resurrected Jesus, we need (I need) occasional reminders about what resurrection actually looks like.

Resurrection doesn't wait for the world to get its act together before it appears. It doesn't wait for justice to be complete or grief to be resolved or disappointment to be satisfied. Instead, it meets us on the road, in the middle of a world that is still very much broken.

Resurrection often happens quietly, stealthily, unobtrusively. Not with flash and spectacle. Not with certainty. Not when everything finally turns out the way we had hoped. But in ordinary moments: of hospitality, of kindness, of encouragement. Of working together for a larger purpose, of setting aside individual glory for collective accomplishment.

Resurrection happens at the communion table, when everyone is invited, everyone is welcomed, and everyone is fed.

Resurrection happens when we doggedly seek out and cling to moments of joy, when we don't allow narratives of fear and violence to drag us down. Jesus was raised from the tomb and sought out the travelers on the Emmaus road to let them—and us—know that disappointment and despair don't get the last word. Love does. Life does. And there is still more. *Amen.*