# Easter 3

**Acts 2:14a, 36-41Ps. 148 Luke 24:13-35**

**A sermon given by Pastor Elaine Hewes**

**April 26, 2020**

**St. Brendan the Navigator Episcopal Church**

On the first three Sundays of the Easter season the Gospel texts appointed for the day are all stories about Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to his followers and disciples, none of whom recognized him by his outward appearance, despite the fact that they had been in his presence for months (maybe even years), and had witnessed Jesus' teaching and healing, his radical reach of inclusion extended to outcasts and sinners, and his insistence upon justice for all people, which of course led to his deadly encounter with those well-situated in the halls of both religious and political power.

The followers and disciples to whom Jesus appeared in the post-resurrection stories were those who knew him best, and yet, none of them recognized him by sight, but rather by certain "qualities of presence"…"qualities of presence" that were **signs** of the crucified and risen Jesus in their midst…

Like the sign the disciples received in John's Gospel as Jesus made himself known through the wounds in his hands and side, first to the disciples cowering behind locked doors on Easter evening, and again, a week later, to Thomas… Thomas exclaiming, upon seeing those signs of suffering love, "My Lord and my God." (This post-resurrection story saying to its hearers and readers, "If you want to see the presence of the crucified and risen Jesus in your midst, look, **this will be a sign unto you**… you will find him wherever there are the marks of accompanying, suffering love.")

This morning's Gospel text from Luke gives other signs of Jesus' presence… this time a "quality of presence" revealed in a choreography of love shaped by the three-fold movements of blessing, breaking and sharing…. The very gestures that opened the eyes of Cleopas and his companion to recognize the crucified and risen Lord in their midst in the breaking of the bread… (This post-resurrection story saying to its hearers and readers, "If you want to see the presence of the crucified and risen Jesus in your midst, look, **this will be a sign unto you…** you will find him wherever bread is blessed and broken and shared.")

This sign working in concert with another in this story; a sign that could easily be missed were it not for this insight from a commentary on the text in which the author writes, *"When the two disciples see Jesus along the road, they don't recognize him, and when at last they do recognize him, they no longer see him. It's almost as though Jesus, the good shepherd, is*

*leading them toward a deeper form of life together, one no longer dependent upon his physical presence with them, but rather focused on how he is spiritually and tangibly present wherever bread is broken, wherever love is done, wherever captives are set free – in short, wherever 'our hearts burn within us' on the way."*

Just as happened to Cleopas and his companion that evening in Emmaus, when, after recognizing the risen Jesus in the breaking of the bread, they said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us as he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us?"

(This part of Luke's post-resurrection story saying to its hearers and readers, "If you want to see the presence of the crucified and risen Jesus in your midst, look**, this will be a sign unto you…** you will find him wherever and whenever, by the power of love, you feel your heart burning within you").

I don't know about you, but in all my many decades of life in the Church, no one ever told me that a sign of the risen Jesus in my midst would be a burning in my heart… No one ever told me that if scripture was opened to me in the way it's intended to be opened, there would be a burning in my heart…

A startling possibility that makes this text the perfect text for the day we bring our celebration of Earth Day to Sunday worship… Because it invites us to imagine that if we were walking with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, or the road to Stonington, or the road to wherever, weighed down by the fears, the anxieties and losses caused by endless global catastrophes (just as Cleopas and his companion were weighed down by the fears, anxieties and losses of their day)… The text invites us to imagine that if we were walking down the road with the risen Jesus, he might very well set our hearts to burning as well…

And given our particular focus this morning on our beautiful, suffering Mother Earth, I think Jesus might go about it this way…

First, I think he would start by reciting our opening poem for this morning by e.e. cummings, as in **overwhelming gratitude**

for the leaping greenly spirits of trees,

for the blue true dream of sky,

and for everything which is natural, which is infinite, which is yes,

**the poet,** alive with sun and love and wings, **cries out** "O God, **how** in the tasting, touching, hearing, seeing, breathing of **any**, lifted from the **no** of **allnothing**, could it be **humanly possible** to doubt **unimaginable You**…

**You** who have **awakened** the ears of my ears and **opened** the eyes of my eyes?"…

And then, I think Jesus would open Scripture to us by taking us back to the very beginning of the story in Genesis (as he did for Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus that day)… Back to the very beginning, where only about twenty words into the story, it says that the "ruah" of God (which is the Hebrew word meaning spirit, wind or breath)… the spirit of God moved over the nothingness (the "allnothing") and breathed into the cosmos the breath of God… The **whole** of the cosmos receiving that Divine breath as creation came into being….

And then, after the moon and stars, the oceans and mountains, the flora and fauna were created, but **before** humankind had come into being, God blessed every living creature, every created thing, as it says in verse 22 of Genesis 1… God blessed **every creature, every created thing**… that blessing intended to be foundational for humankind's understanding of its right place in the "whole of things"… Not as "something over" but as protectors and artistic caretakers of the blessing in which the whole of creation is held…

I think Jesus would set our hearts to burning by bringing us back to the wild, windy, passionate Spirit of love **breathed into the whole of the cosmos** at the beginning… the same passionate love that awakens the ears of our ears and opens the eyes of eyes to see beyond the confines of our own little tribes, our own narrow viewpoints, our own set of limited identity markers, our fears and anxieties…

The same passionate love that says on the road to every Emmaus, "If you want to see the presence of the crucified and risen Christ in your midst, look, **this will be a sign unto you**… you will find him wherever you sense yourself part of the whole… Whenever you sense your "oneness" with all of creation, held in love in the vast constellation of everything which is natural, which is infinite, which is yes…"

And then… just before reaching Emmaus, or Stonington, or wherever we may be going, I think Jesus might share this bit of wisdom with us from Catholic priest Richard Rohr who writes, "The presence of the risen Christ is anything that returns us to God… anything that charges us and grounds us and connects us to what matters… The presence of the risen Christ is anything that awakens us to our common humanity and the interdependence of all of creation."

"If you want to see the presence of the crucified and risen Christ in your midst, look, **this will be a sign unto you**… your heart will break open, and **you will know that between you and God, and between you and the world God so loves, there is no between**… and in the leaping greenly spirit of that illimitable knowing, you will be able to say, along with Cleopas and his companion, "I have seen the Lord."

So on this third Sunday of Easter, as we bring the celebration of Earth Day to the question of where we sense **signs** of the Risen Christ awakening the ears of our ears and opening the eyes of our eyes to our common humanity and the interdependence of all of creation, I'd like to hear from any of you who are willing to share… any of you who are willing to share what you have seen or heard in the beautiful world that surrounds us that has set your heart to burning and to sensing the love that holds us all….

*Sharing….*

Thank you all for your sharing, each of you bearing testimony to where and when you have had your ears awakened and your eyes opened to sense, to know the love that holds all of creation in a oneness and a completeness beyond our understanding… the **recognition** of that unifying love through the gifts of creation being a **sign** of the crucified and risen Christ in our midst… a **sign** of the wild, windy, life-giving greenly Spirit of God…

Calling us to bear witness in both word and deed to what we have seen and heard… So that by our living… by our accompanying and suffering love… by the blessing, breaking and sharing of our lives… by the passion and artistry we bring to the care of our Mother Earth, we too might be signs of Christ's eternal rising…

Because what if it's true… What if the message I read on the message board outside the Essex Street Baptist Church in Bangor is true… The one that simply said, **"What if God is looking for a sign from us?"**

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