

Easter 3A: 4/26/20
St. Paul's, Wallingford CT
The Rev. Dee Anne Dodd

That Gospel was the first I ever preached as a seminarian at the main service at St. James', Madison Ave, in New York. It's a large church with a large staff (including multiple seminarians) so it was a big deal to finally preach at the august 11:15 service.

It's a different scene when we gather at beautiful St Paul's on a typical Sunday. But whether here or there or wherever I've served in-between, there's a lot I miss these days.

We've all had to give up or get used to a lot these past weeks. We've all experienced tremendous upheaval and loss.

So did the people in today's gospel.

The folks we read about – Cleopas and the unnamed friend – were just coming off a whiplash of a week with their friend Jesus. It began with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem with the crowds calling out “Hosanna” and ended with the bloodthirsty cry of “Crucify him!” which came to pass on Golgotha.

Earlier that very morning the women had gone to pay their final respects only to find the tomb empty.

They shared the remarkable news that Jesus was alive.

How were Cleopas and the unnamed friend supposed to process all that?

They did what a lot of us would do. They took a long walk.

You heard what happens.

Jesus joined them but “their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”

They weren't struck blind; what kept them from seeing Jesus?

Maybe the same things that keep us from seeing him.

Maybe they were just so distressed -- or distracted.

Maybe they didn't believe they'd ever see him again so didn't bother to look.

Whatever the reason, it didn't deter Jesus.

He showed up anyway, walked along with them, listened to them.

Listened to their disappointments. Their fears. Their babbling.

Then he made sense of it all, putting their lives in the context of Scripture.

As evening fell and they reached their destination, Jesus,
 who'd been with them all the time,
 who promised to be with them forever,
 who would be with them no matter what --
 awaited an invitation to join them in the home.
 Jesus longed to be invited into a place he already was

And they did invite him. It says that they "urged him, strongly."

I mentioned earlier that the other person walking with Cleopas
 and Jesus didn't have a name.

But of course this person, this child of God, has a name.

What's your name?

That's the name of whom Jesus walks with today.

Distressed or distracted,
 or in disbelief that Jesus would walk with you,
 Jesus is there -- listening, eager to make sense of your life.

Invite him in.

Invite Jesus into your home and hearth and heart.

He won't take much convincing, but go ahead -- "urge him, strongly."

And as you invite him into your home,
 may you realize that he's not a guest at all;
 he's been there all along.
 Like Cleopas and his friend, let Jesus be the host in your home.
 Let him be known to you in the breaking of the bread
 at your table or counter or TV tray.
 Let Jesus open your eyes to recognize him there with you.

Now there is one more twist in this story, when it says that
 Jesus "vanished from their sight."

But this doesn't mean he went away.

No, his presence with them was so intense, so passionate,
 that their "hearts burned within them" as they thought of
 what they'd learned from Jesus and how he changed their lives.

That very hour, already late, they got up and started walking again
to form a community that would show the world
that the Lord has risen indeed. Alleluia!

That's what we're to be about too, even now.

Constrained though our lives are during these long days of quarantine,
we're still called to be passionate to proclaim the Easter message
that Christ is risen.

How we treat those we do see,
those with whom we may be feeling a bit cooped up by now.
How we treat ourselves.

Pray for others – especially those who don't immediately come to mind.

Reach out to others. Here I give a special thanks to those Vestry members
and so many others who are faithfully calling members of the congregation.
God bless you, and keep it up.

In this week's bulletin there are opportunities to serve guests of Master's Manna and
our Diaper Sunday families, urgently needed, now.

And, yes, we proclaim that Christ is risen when we think ahead,
praying for wisdom, about what life will be like when we finally emerge
from this odd era.

I hope you realize we're not going to flip a switch and
just pick up where we left off.

Who, then, do we want to be when we come out of this?

And what do we do now to help us get there?

Who does God need us to be?

How will we go about proclaiming that the Lord is risen indeed
in that new reality, whatever it looks like?

I loved that beautiful new hymn to an old tune
we sang with the quartet at the beginning of the liturgy;
from the final verse:

*We thank you that on Easter, your church is blessed to be
a scattered, faithful body that's doing ministry.*

*In homes and in the places of help and healing, too,
we live the Easter message of gladly serving you.*

Thanks be to God.