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Easter Sunday
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Luke 24:13-32

In the Middle of a Miracle

Intro: The butterfly here on the pulpit is a great improvement from last week, True story, after our Sunday evening worship last week, I found a bat up here inside the pulpit! It was right where I leave my notes, I assumed it was dead. Turns out it was just sleeping, must have been reading my sermon. Resurrection is not just waking up, or even flying away. It is a miracle of God not to be missed. Here this story from Luke.

Sometimes you can be in the middle of a miracle and miss it. A friend e-mailed a cute story a little while ago. It is about a man who was late for an important meeting downtown but could not find a parking place. He circled his building several times: nothing. He drove up and down all the streets in the surrounding area but every spot was taken. All the parking garages had signs out front that said full. The more he drove around, the later he got; and the later he got, the more frantic he became, because he had to get to this meeting; his whole career depended on parking his car but he could not find a space.

Finally, though he wasn't a religious man, he decided to ask God for help. Lifting his voice to heaven he said, "Lord, I know I haven't really paid much attention to you in

my life but I... I really need a parking space. Lord, if you show me a parking place I will stop sinning and start going to church. If you find me a place to park my car I will volunteer at the shelter and give to the poor -- Lord, if you give me a parking spot right now I promise to become a new man!"

As soon as he finished praying a parking spot miraculously opened up right in front of the building he was going to -- right in front of the main entrance... and there was an hour and a half of time still left on the meter. The man swerved into the spot, turned off the ignition and with a great sigh of relief lifted his voice again in prayer and said, "Never mind Lord, I found one."

Sometimes you can be in the middle of a miracle and miss it. You know when we

read the Easter stories in the Gospels two things become clear: one, the empty tomb was not a stunt, a rumor, or a grave robbery -- it was miracle. And two, most of his disciples missed that miracle, at least at first. The women who went to the garden that first Easter morning did not expect resurrection and mistook the risen Christ for the gardener -- they almost missed him. The disciples who went to investigate the women's report were equally confused by the empty tomb and went away wondering what had happened -- they were mystified. In the verse just before where we started reading today, in verse 11, it says of the disciples when they heard the women's words regarding the empty tomb that it "seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." (If we feel somewhat distant from Easter miracle today we should know that we are at least in good company.)

And then there was Cleopas and his friend. Not only did they miss the miracle in Jerusalem on Easter morning, they also missed it Easter afternoon out on the road when the risen Christ came and walked and talked with them (and lead them in what must have been the greatest Bible study ever); and they almost missed it Easter evening when Jesus acted as though he were going to keep walking once they arrived at Emmaus. We look back now knowing the story well and perhaps shake our heads at their slow-wittedness but the truth is: sometimes we can be in the middle of a miracle and miss it.

And it might serve us well to wonder this Easter morning, 2000 years later: how does

one miss a miracle? Missing a deadline, missing the bus, missing the point of a sermon, sure, that we get. Missing seeing a shooting star or a great concert or a significant moment in our children's' lives -- these we can relate to with varying degrees of empathy. But how do you miss a miracle? ...All too easily I'm afraid.

And is it possible that today -- with all our Easter familiarity -- is it possible that still we might miss the miracle? We can rebury the good news of the resurrection with our tether on tradition. Let us not imagine that Easter is simply history -- it is here and now: it is miracle still for this day and age. It is Christ risen and alive, as present with us now as when a houseguest in Emmaus.

And yet, the truth is, we in the church do not always experience the reality of the living Christ. We do not always know the reality of the resurrection in our lives. The truth is, we can be in the middle of a miracle and miss it. It's happened to me -- I know there have been times when I was walking on holy ground but I just stumbled around like my shoe laces were tied together.

Easter is not meaningless religious ritual, it's resurrection. Easter is not a cultural tradition -- it's transformation. Easter is not just hallowed remembrance -- it is holy experience and divine encounter: Easter is the risen Christ coming to us in the midst of our journey of faith and walking with us until our hearts stir and our souls sing.

The text today says that missing the miracle, for Cleopas and his friend, was a matter of

the heart -- Jesus gently nudges them for being slow of heart to believe. I find that a piercing and poignant phrase: slow of heart to believe. There was within their souls a reluctance to lean out and believe in an extraordinary God who might do things far beyond their expectations. Slow of heart to believe means that they heard the facts -- they had been told of the resurrection already -- they just had a reticence of spirit, a nagging gnawing doubt that held them back and caused them to hesitate and eventually head out from the place of faith.

And we should know that as they walk the road out of Jerusalem they are doing more than just going home to Emmaus. They are leaving the Holy city; they are walking away from the center of their religion -- they are turning their backs on God. As they leave Jerusalem, they are exiles of hope; they are fugitives of faith.

The road to Emmaus is the road we walk when we can no longer stay in the painful place. It is our escape route when we can no longer bear the disappointments of life. It is the road out; the road away from the hurt; but also road away from the community of faith. The Emmaus Road is anyplace where we find ourselves seven miles from hope and struggling to believe.

But it is NOT the road of God forsakenness! God in Christ meets them on that road and walks with them in their despair. I love the fact that every time Jesus appears to the disciples after the resurrection, it is not because THEY have sought him but because HE finds them.

Now we don't know, but I imagine that Cleopas and his friend slipped quietly out of Jerusalem that first Easter afternoon without saying goodbye to the others. I imagine they left quickly and quietly, out one of the side doors, wanting to put as much distance as they could between themselves and the place where, not just Jesus, but hope itself had died.

It's not Easter if we only sing the hymns and listen to the story and color the eggs. It's Easter when we roll away the stone of our hearts and invite this stranger-God into our lives. Today can be a day of new faith for us. This can be a day when our hearts burn with the reality of the living Christ; but we have to invite him in and make him Lord of our lives.

I like this story in Luke 24 because it talks about disciples this side of Easter who nonetheless still struggle with faith and who sometimes miss God's presence in their lives, and I find I can relate. But I love this story because it tells me that we, who can be slow of heart to believe, can in our journey of faith be met by Christ, even when we don't fully recognize him. And along the way -- over time -- in the miracle of a graciousness that companions us even in our fleeing and our doubt -- along the way Christ walks with us. And our hearts begin to stir and our souls begin to resonate and our spirits start to yearn and at some point, in the middle of the miracle... we see and celebrate. And then Easter once more becomes for us holy ground! Hallelujah, amen!

Friends, we need not look back in time to see the risen Christ. He is here now-- alive and with us. Through our doubts and in our questions; despite our direction and in spite of our slowness of heart Christ is here now; stirring our hearts, breaking open our vision -- calling us to new life today. In the middle of this miracle... let's not miss it! Christ is Risen, he is Risen Indeed. Amen.