

Jesus' disciples walked on the road to Emmaus on the third day after the crucifixion. Today marks the beginning of the third *week* after that day. This is the third Sunday of Easter. In ancient Hebrew tradition, three was a significant number. It signified completion, the sum of a transaction, the culmination of a process. For example, Jesus told his followers that the temple would be destroyed and that he would raise it up in three days. Those words were mystifying to Jesus' disciples as well as the Pharisees and Sadducees. Three days to rebuild a temple? That was impossible! Jesus liked to engage in word play. It would indeed take three days for Jesus' mission to ultimately be fulfilled, but his mission did not include a construction project. In fact, when he talked about raising the temple, he wasn't talking about a building at all.

What the disciples came to realize, but only after Jesus' brutal crucifixion, was that Jesus's body was the new temple in this new holy paradigm that Jesus ushered in. When the Roman soldiers broke, no destroyed, Jesus' body it was for Jesus' followers as if the temple had been destroyed. In ancient Jewish tradition, God resided in the temple. The irony was that God *did* live in the dwelling the Romans destroyed, not in the temple but in the body of Jesus. And on the third day that body rose, just as Jesus had prophesied. The details of that resurrection are a mystery and will forever remain so. But it is true that Jesus rose again and appeared to many of his faithful followers. We believe that is true because even now we sense the presence of the risen Christ, more than two thousand years later.

But back to the number three. The number three is also significant because it is the number that describes our holy three in one, our Holy Trinity. Even though the concept of the trinity came about in the fourth century after Jesus' death, that concept has remained permanently linked to the movement that Jesus inspired. That movement is called Christianity and it professes Christ as the Lord of it. That movement also claims our creator God and the Holy Spirit of God as equal partners in that Lordship.

Now lets back up a bit. Let's go back to those first days after Jesus died. Those early days left the disciples in a fog, wondering what to do and where to go. Should they stay on the

journey they had begun or should they just pack it in and go home? While they were wondering, Jesus came to them out of that fog, almost as if in a dream. He just showed up. He showed up with the two disciples as they walked along the road to Emmaus. As a group of disciples were locked in an upper room, frightened of the future and pondering their fate, he showed up. He showed up for Mary Magdalene, for Peter and for the unnamed beloved disciple outside the tomb.

Remember the story of Thomas, the twin who doubted that Jesus had really risen from the dead? We read that last week. Jesus showed up for him, too. But there is yet another disciple who had a hard time fully grasping who Jesus was. That disciple was Peter. It was Peter who began to sink as he attempted to walk on water toward Jesus' outstretched hand. It was Peter who balked at having Jesus wash his feet. It was Peter who denied three times that he even knew Jesus.

Though the disciples were male and they were Jewish, and I am female and not Jewish, I admit that I can identify with Peter in his hesitation to commit himself to Jesus. At various times in my life I felt called to commit to following Christ. But so many times, the world's invitation seemed clearer, more real. Newspapers, magazines, televisions, speakers in the college town where I grew up all pointed me in the direction of pursuing a high paying career. If I had only realized that I could pursue any career, and my path would be clearer for me, if I put God first. I thought that one excluded the other. I chose worldly pursuits and denied Jesus my commitment.

In high school, I was caught up in the whole mystery of Jesus. He was alluring and captivating, but I wondered - who was he *really*? And how was it that he was God's son but was a full human being at the same time? How could that be? In college, I was drawn to deeper thinking. I studied the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. I listened more intently to sermons. But the world drew me in another direction. The 70s were a time of women emerging into the realm of business executives, engineers, doctors, and lawyers at a pace never seen before. I could be

one of them, I thought. One of those women who could have it all. And so I denied Jesus, maybe more than three times.

But then there were the times when Peter was completely faithful to Jesus, walking along side him and soaking in all that Jesus had to teach. He was with Jesus when he climbed the mountain and was visited by Moses and Elijah. At that moment he was spellbound by the mystery and wonder of his blossoming relationship with Jesus. He confessed that he believed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. He told Jesus that he was ready to go all the way with him, even if it meant spending his life in prison. But then the cock crowed three times and Peter realized he had copped out.

It wasn't until Peter had met the risen Christ that he came to fully believe in all that Jesus was. He came to believe that Jesus was precisely the person that his instincts led him to trust and follow. He came to realize before any of the others what he must do. In the story we heard this morning from the book of Acts, Peter took center stage. After the crucifixion, word had spread among the Jewish people that Jesus had been crucified and then somehow, some way rose from being dead to appear to his followers. They had gathered in Jerusalem by the thousands. Since they had been dispersed by circumstances of captivity and economics they spoke many different languages. But somehow, some way that day when Peter took center stage they understood what he was saying. This was the moment of Pentecost according to Luke. This was the moment when the Holy Spirit came into the room like the rush of the wind.

The presence of the Holy Spirit doesn't always come like the wind. Father Bill and I believe the people of St. John's have sensed the incoming of the Spirit quite often. I know I sense it here. When we stop focusing on the business and politics and consumerism of the world we live in and focus instead on our relationships we begin to know that the Holy Spirit is present with us. When I began to repent of my misguided aims; began to turn away trying to find a full life *without* putting God at the top of my list, I began to know the risen Christ.

I repented, I turned toward God. But, repentance isn't a one time thing. The world is way too alluring for us not to be pulled off track pretty often. It's good for us to have something we can rely on to pull us back to center when we get lost. Fortunately we have the Eucharist that always pulls me back. But outside of church, I have a stone that pulls me back. It is a small stone that has unique markings. Those markings look like an "x," reminding of my center. Having recently been diagnosed with MS I found myself overwhelmed. My body was failing me and I was filled with fear and anxiety. Just getting through each episode was an incredible challenge. I remember one day falling on my knees and confessing to God that I could not get through that time in my life all on my own. I prayed to God for guidance. When I rose up from kneeling, I caught sight of that stone. That moment will stay with me forever. When I looked at my stone, the "x" in the center of it was transformed for me into a cross. Peace suddenly came over me. I grasped right then that Christ IS my center. It was an ah-ha moment for me.

I imagine Peter had an ah-ha moment when the risen Christ showed up for him. He finally realized that all along Christ had been his center. He realized that Christ was available to everyone to anchor and center them in the heart of God the Father.

Peter made a proclamation to the crowd gathered around him in Jerusalem. He said "Let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." It was hard to hear, but the people understood him. While they knew they had not physically crucified him, they knew they were guilty of not believing in him with their whole being. Luke tells us they were "cut to the heart" by what Peter said. They were enormously remorseful. They wanted to do *something, anything* to be relieved of their painful guilt. Peter had an answer for them. He told them to repent and be baptized and in so doing they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. He pleaded with them saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

The corrupt generation Peter was referring to were the Jews who just could not see that through Jesus was God acting in their lives. They couldn't understand that God was giving them

a *new* law, a *new* covenant. They were afraid of letting go of what they knew and stepping through the doorway to the new life that God was offering.

Friends, I believe we may be living in the era of a different kind of “corrupt generation.” We see around our world people who out of fear hide away in the rigid security of ancient law and tradition. They are people who cultivate and hope to propagate a fearful us versus them mentality. They are people that try to apply literalism that is static and unresponsive to a spirit filled life that is dynamic and relational. The corrupt generation is made up of people who are afraid to open up their hearts to the message that Jesus brought into the world; a message that is empowered by God’s Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ message is the heart of the missional movement of agape love that we are part of today. So today on this third Sunday of Easter, we recognize the life and work of Jesus and remember his suffering at the hand of worldly devised power. As we remember with hearts on fire, I ask what can we *do*? I think the answer is to recommit ourselves to Christ with all of our hearts and all of our minds and all of our strength. Can we do this? I believe we can, with God’s help.