



The Inclusive Community

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Theological Worlds - 5

June 27, 2010

Luke 24: 13-35 John 19:23-27

Homily of Dr. George H. McDonald

My Hebrew friends call me Clopas. Greeks call me Cleopas. They're both me. My wife, Mary, and I live in Emmaus, a town about seven miles west of Jerusalem. We met Jesus through our son James. James is even shorter than I am. So we called him Little Jimmy. You call him James the Lesser. He was one of Jesus' first followers.

I guess we should have expected something like that from Little Jimmy. He was always a bit different from the other children. He spent a lot of time brooding, dreaming. Most Jews dream of the time when Judah will be free from the tyranny of Rome. Jimmy dreamed of a world of love, justice and peace, where everyone had enough to live on, and although some might have more than others, no one would have too much. He talked of a community where justice was just, but regularly meted out with mercy.

He may have gotten some of that from me. I was a dreamer, too. Some dreams I outgrew; others were simply crushed by life. Maybe I'm wiser now. Maybe I mellowed. Or maybe, I'm just cynical and callous!

When I was young, I dreamed of being a baker like my father. However, he died when I was only fifteen. As was the custom, my older brother took over the business. But my brother was not the businessman my father was. Within a few years, the bakery was on the verge of collapse. So I began to make most of the decisions, and do most of the work. He got most of the money.

Mary and I scrimped and saved. She did a lot of work outside our home, too, to earn money. When I was twenty, we left our home in Arimathea, and moved to Emmaus, where we opened our own bakery. The bread we bake is wholesome and delicious! The price is fair. We did well. But the Romans keep raising my taxes. Things got hard! We worked harder!

I guess I have just grown accustomed to hard. Life often comes to me that way. Not always, of course! But I have experienced a lot of injustice, hurt, disappointment and being misunderstood in my life. I think it has been more than my share. Maybe we all feel that way. On the other hand, this has made me sensitive to the oppressed, the helpless, the victims of life. For years, I have given free bread to the leper colony outside of Emmaus. Would you believe they make me pay taxes on that bread, too? But I digress. I was talking about Jesus.

Little Jimmy was one of Jesus' first disciples. Once, when they were in Jerusalem, Jimmy invited Jesus to visit Emmaus. I was a bit surprised when I met him. He was as short as Jimmy -- sort of ordinary

looking. The remarkable thing about him was his eyes. I noticed them first, and never escaped them! -- dark, deep-sunk -- haunting! Like he could see right through me!

As Jesus talked, I understood how Little Jimmy had concluded he was the Messiah promised by God. He spoke of "the Kingdom of God;" said it was already in our midst; talked a lot about God loving us, and about us really caring for people. He used the word compassion - to feel with others, to share life, with all its joy and its pain, its hopes and its fears, with them.

Mary and I became Jesus' disciples, too. Everyone in Emmaus heard our stories of his vision, his teachings. We even went back to Arimathea, where I was born, to share Jesus' message with our friends there. My old friend, Joseph, the rabbi in Arimathea, became Jesus' disciple, too.

Mary and I were with Jesus that Sunday before Passover, when he rode into Jerusalem. I remembered what the prophet Zechariah had written:

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he. ... He shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth."

Jesus just had to be the Messiah! Mary and I danced down the street beside him, singing "Hosanna" to the promised Messiah.

We were with Jesus that last week, as he drove the money changers out of the temple, as he upbraided some of the religious leaders as hypocrites. "At last," I thought to myself, "a leader who will stand up **for** the poor and oppressed, who will stand **with** the needy and the helpless!"

We were with Jesus' inner circle as we celebrated Pesach. I thought it strange when he said the bread was his body -broken; when he called the Passover cup the cup of the New Covenant in his poured - out blood.

Then he and the eleven went out to pray. Soldiers came, arrested him, and finally took him to Pilate, who had him crucified.

We ran and hid, afraid the soldiers would get us too. Mary and a few of the women went, and watched, and wept, as he died. My old friend Joseph, from Arimathea, actually asked Pilate for Jesus' body, so we could bury it before the Sabbath began.

I thought I was a bit more acquainted with having my best dreams shattered, scattered, and splattered, in my face. That's pretty much been the story of my life! But Saturday, was total blackness and despair for everyone, including me!

Early Sunday morning, a few women went to Jesus' tomb. Breathlessly, they returned, and told us the tomb was open, and empty! Even said an angel told them Jesus was alive.

Yeah! Right! That's when Mary and I left. No more wish-dreams or illusions for me! So there Mary and I were -- alone, again! We couldn't help talking about what had happened.

As we crested a hill, we came upon a man going in our direction. He asked to walk with us. We poured out our grief on him -- all of our shattered hopes. "We thought Jesus was the Messiah! Obviously, he wasn't!" Then I remember saying, "If God really cares for the poor and helpless as the scriptures say,

then where was God on Friday? Where is the almighty Lord when things like that are going on? If that good God is content to sit on his throne up in the sky somewhere while people are hurt, abused, oppressed, victimized -- by others, or by life itself, then to hell with God!"

The stranger listened. Then he suggested that we look in other parts of the scripture, to get a clearer, more realistic image of the Messiah.

He said, "The Messiah is not about lovely promises of royal power and might, nor beautiful illusions of sweetness, nor little lies that say life should be fair.

The author and sustainer of life is more than merely concerned about our suffering. Through the Messiah, God understands our suffering, shares it with us, helps us bear it, encourages and guides us to overcome it. But all I saw was the road a few feet in front of me, and the darkness inside me.

By that time, we were home. Mary invited him in to eat with us. As we sat around the table, he picked up the loaf of bread. "Before we eat," he said, "let me tell you a story.

A certain couple went on a quest to find the Messiah. Finally, someone told them that he was on a nearby hilltop, teaching. As they approached the hill, they could see him, surrounded by hundreds of persons. He was tall, dressed in a shining white robe. They made their way up through the crowd, where they discovered that he looked tall because he was standing on a big rock. The hem of his white was filthy from his walking the dusty roads. The robe had huge sweat marks under the arms and down the back.

He raised his hand. The crowd hushed. "You are waiting for the Messiah." The people roared in agreement.

Again he raised his hand. Instantaneously, the crowd quieted. "I have wonderful news for you." Again the crowd erupted, cheering, shouting.

Once again: a hand is raised, a hush falls, the gospel is proclaimed, "*There is no Messiah, and I am he!*"

With that the stranger broke the loaf in half. As one voice, Mary and I shouted, "Jesus!" And he disappeared, along with the Darkness within us. "**There is no Messiah, and he is Jesus!**"

We grabbed the bread, and a couple of dates, and ran to Jerusalem as fast as possible. By the time we got to that upper room, Jesus had appeared to them, also. And they, too, had been transformed, in the breaking of the bread. Darkness, despair and aloneness in this mysterious universe were gone!

One final thing I must share with you. The word companion literally means "one who breaks bread with me." As I make my faith journey across the arid desert of life, I am never alone, nor misunderstood. The darkness which had both filled and surrounded me was God. Christ is always my companion. In the midst of my broken life, I can still see him, in the breaking of the bread. Amen and Amen.

THEOLOGICAL WORLD 5

Adapted from Theological Worlds, by W. Paul Jones

LIFE RHYTHM	Suffering/Endurance
FEELS LIKE	being overwhelmed
SIN IS	meaningless suffering
STATE of BEING	victim, refugee
ROLE OF CHRIST	A companion who walks with us and understands us when no one else does
IMAGE OF JESUS	The Suffering Servant
SALVATION	Enduring with integrity
SPIRITUALITY	Volitional aridity of the desert; Dark Night of the Soul
REASON JESUS MIGHT GIVE FOR GOING TO JERUSALEM TO BE CRUCIFIED	All things, even the seeming absence of God, can become signs of the presence of God; Moving from <i>"My God, my God, why...?"</i> to <i>"Abba, into your hands I commend my spirit."</i>