

“Closer Than You Think”

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Luke 24:13-35

For any of us who have driven a car, we have all see those words printed on a side view mirror that say “Objects in mirror are closer than they appear.” The words remind us that because of the mirror’s convex shape, although it allows us to see more, what we see in the mirror seems further away.

These words are an apt description of so much of what we take in on a day to day basis when it comes to how we see the world around us. As we watch television newscasts and read reports on internet news feeds, we find ourselves confronted by challenges and problems and global issues that just seem so out of reach for most of us. We hear and read about the broad issues of global health, economics and education but most of us can wonder what difference it makes or what difference we can make when these objects in our vision seem so far away.

The two individuals who we first encounter in this reading from Luke’s gospel this morning are faced with a similar view. They are on the road to Emmaus, back to their own little village or neighbourhood that was some distance from the city of Jerusalem. They were walking and reflecting on some of the events that had just happened there, fresh on the heels of the news about Jesus, a prophet mighty in word and deed who had entered Jerusalem, and had been crucified yet reports had surfaced that he had risen.

I picture these two looking in the rearview mirror as it were, perhaps looking back and thinking that their lives were now somehow far removed from those events. They likely wondered about their significance and what bearing any of it had on their lives. After all, Jerusalem was a part of the global stage in their world. They were two, individual souls on a journey...what difference did it make? As they looked in the rear view mirror, they had not yet realized that those events in Jerusalem, were closer to them than how they appeared.

That is until, while walking along the road, they encounter a stranger who walks with them. A stranger who turns out to be the risen Christ, who helps them to comprehend how those events were a lot closer to their experience than they thought. Those events had significance that were both local and personal and that God’s activity in the world was not

some far off concept or idea. God was a living, active, life changing *and* world changing presence in their midst.

You see, for many people, sometimes the Christian faith seems to float above the gritty circumstances of life, disconnected from the "local issues." Can faith actually become something applicable to the day to day? For many of us the gospel may seem vaguely true, we can affirm the faith in the same way we can affirm that the planet Venus is 108 million kms from the sun. It's true in one sense, but does it really make any difference in our lives?

What difference does it make in the ins and outs of everyday life; what difference does it make in the way we work, play, vote, spend money, make decisions, love or hate, change direction or hold steady, and make the hundreds of choices, large and small, that make up the fabric of our lives; what difference does it make that on a Sunday morning long ago an itinerant preacher named Jesus of Nazareth was not found in the tomb where he had been buried a few days before? In other words, what does the Easter faith have to do with the local issues?

To me the some of the evidence is found here in what we do this morning. As we gather we acknowledge the difference that God makes in our lives and ultimately in the world. We acknowledge that God is closer than how many people think of God. We acknowledge in baptism that God's spirit is as close to us as water that touches our skin and quenches our souls. We acknowledge that God is as much a part of us and our living as the bread we consume and the cup we share in communion. We celebrate our anniversary, not to just look back in a mirror at the way things used to be, we celebrate that we are still here after 58 years, we celebrate God's proximity to us. As Eugene Peterson puts it in his paraphrase of John 1, verse 14, we affirm that "The Word became flesh and moved into the neighbourhood."

It is this reality the two walking back to their neighbourhood of Emmaus realize after they encountered the transformative presence of the risen Christ in their lives. This wasn't just front page news about some global event...this was a happening that you might find buried somewhere in community news or the human interest section. God was in the immediate proximity of their lives.

As Tom Long notes, what the travelers encountered on the road to Emmaus that day is something we echo here on a Sunday morning...in our local church. During the course of their encounter:

There is a creed that repeats the story of who Jesus is, his mission and what happened from verses 19-24.

There is a sermon, a verse 27 states that Jesus “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.”

And they have communion, when Jesus stays with them and as verse 30 says, “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.”

The promise of Christ’s world changing, life changing presence came home in that place in the midst of the lives of those two persons walking the road, just as it does to us in this place into our lives as a local church.

You see, nobody knows better than our maker that if we want to change the world, the change is something that needs to be local. It needs to be personal. Change comes when our lives and the way we live is transformed. When we, like the two on the road to Emmaus, discover our hearts burning within us.

I was reminded of this kind of change while recently watching a documentary on the life of Grace Lee Boggs. Grace Lee Boggs, who died last October at age 100 was an activist, philosopher and noted author. She spent the early years of her life as a part of the global revolutionary movement...yet as life went on, she dropped the “r” from revolutionary and began to follow a philosophy that was more evolutionary. Boggs, reflected that she came to understand how revolution was something that needed to be local...in the sphere of one’s life. She had spent most of her lifetime to bring about transformation and change in her adopted city of Detroit. Be it through labour rights, racial equality, unemployment, the war on drugs, speaking out against violence...the list goes on. But for Boggs, something that set her activism apart from many of her peers, was that she knew change in the world wasn’t something that would come about just by a revolution that seeks control or to change the powers that be. Changing the world meant first looking within. Revolution requires an evolution of the self. She believed that the changes she craved in the world only could only come when she was

reflective in her own life. When her heart burned within her to not only transform the world, but open herself to change from within.

You see, Boggs came to appreciate in her life that same epiphany the two travelers had on the Road to Emmaus. It is what we celebrate and open ourselves to as a neighbourhood church, as a spiritual community, as St. Stephen's on-the-Hill.

God is closer than we think.

When we can be overwhelmed by the global issues, and life's big problems, the hope this world and every human life needs is closer than we think.

Our lives, the lives of others have this grace filled hope that this world is changed as we open ourselves to God's transformative presence...even here. Even when at Communion this morning, we take the bread of heaven from this table, and say quietly to ourselves and to our God, "Let there be grace and peace and hope...and let it begin here...let it begin in my home, my neighbourhood, my church...in my baptism...in the breaking of the bread...let it begin in me."