

## ***Inviting in the Stranger***

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

April 26, 2020

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

This week after the news story broke of a shooting in Nova Scotia, hearing new detail after new detail, each seeming surreal, unfathomable. I have to confess, I was stunned... Then I felt disconsolate... helpless... I grieved... At times I felt anger that such an incident should not happen. **Not in small**, caring communities. Not in Canada. It isn't fair.

My friends, all of us isolating at home, living this ongoing daily loop, as my colleague Catherine calls it, "**Groundhog Day**," referring to the movie about a man who finds himself waking up every morning living out the same day over and over tediously living out the same experiences day after day after day. Easter has come, and gone and with all that's gone on, I'm not certain that I experienced the job of Easter as I usually do – or perhaps the transformative impact has not stuck for me in this groundhog day existence.

I look at Cleopas and his companion on their 7-mile journey; powerful experiences of Jesus on roads are a signature of the storytelling for the Gospel of Luke.<sup>1</sup> Leaving behind them in Jerusalem the ashen remains of their hopes for a Messiah, the two travellers walk back to whatever awaits them. On a 7-mile walk, there is an abundance of time to ponder.

A stranger joins them, asks them why they are forlorn, and they tell him that they heard good news, Easter news, from the witnesses who found an empty tomb – they heard the News – but still these men are grieving! Their reaction to this mysterious stranger, does it seem vaguely familiar to you? Hearts broken, hope shattered, faith bruised. I can relate to that feeling – I'm guessing you can too. Left to meander where it wishes, our mind can latch onto hurt, disappointment, grief, and not let go. It's important work, you know, acknowledging our true pain.

But this Emmaus story translated into modern terms meets us on our long walk from Easter to who-knows-where; from the hum drum daily loop of life, maybe holding onto the thin thread of hope that some glimmer of light or good news lays ahead of us on this road. If we are lucky we hold that hope.

This coronavirus shadow can do that... THEN when we watch the news, bad news of tragedy hitting our peaceful neighbourhood called Canada. Well, well, we might not notice the stranger coming alongside us wanting to reveal something of wonder and good news to us.

Easter resurrection hope does not come based on a calendar or a clock - the biblical word for when holy moments come is "Kairos"<sup>2</sup> ... as in Cleopas and his friend experienced a Kairos moment. Wonder and hope take hold in our lives not based on human time but, rather, it is God's time when those moments come. That moment

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Barreto. Commentary on Luke 24:13-35. [workingpreacher.com](http://workingpreacher.com) April 26, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Shannon Michael Pater, "Pastoral Perspective" *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word* – Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide.

came, not on that road to Emmaus for those two, but it was after they offered the stranger in, and as the stranger took over as host, shared bread and wine, then, finally, their eyes and hearts opened – Christ was risen.

So I'm thinking aloud here. Maybe many of us are on this road to Emmaus these days. Confined to our homes, physically distanced from loved ones, living routinized days and all of us normalized by what seems like daily bad news.

Maybe WE are invited by Cleopas and his unnamed companion to first of all hold onto the Easter message, even if we don't feel it. Hold in our hearts a glimmer of hope that in the worst days for followers of Jesus, when they, we, very possibly have given up hope – God answers with resurrection and hope. If we are frustrated, grieving, angry, disillusioned then the Easter story may not be sinking in. It obviously didn't for Cleopas and his friend. But may we pay attention for signs of new life and wonder all around us even as we go about our Groundhog Day routines.

My partner Tracey pays attention to every bird visiting our deck to enjoy seed, and all of us in the house get to hear about it. It makes me smile. I find the wee hours of the morning, a clear sky filled with stars, beckons me to welcome wonder into my soul. Where is the stranger along your Emmaus road of routine, or, perhaps lurking in your peripheral vision, requiring you to take notice, to pay attention and invite encounter?

One Bible scholar suggests that:

*Easter does not always come in three days.*

*Stones are rolled away, but sometimes we stay in the tomb...*

Can you be attentive and receptive to our Creator's rhythm? If Luke's story on that Emmaus Road is going to have an impact, Shannen Michael Pater suggests that we need to make a choice. We can stay in the abstract, keep an intellectual distance, like those travellers who wondered – I paraphrase, "How could it have been that we did not recognize him?!"

We have another choice, other than seeing this as just a story. We can occupy the bodies and souls of those travellers having welcomed in the stranger, and discovering that Jesus had become their host – we, like them, can be fully present. Linger in every moment of wonder, allowing the holy stranger to disperse the clouds of despair and cynicism in us. To allow the inbreaking of God's Good News.

Let's be real and honest about our grief, despair, worry right now. But, let us also be attentive to strangers along our daily paths that might bring us wonder. And when that Kairos, God-given moment of wonder arrives, dare to share the story you are gifted with, with its joy, and good news. Like Tracey not letting anyone ignore those birds. who in your life needs to hear your stories of wonder so that they can encounter the stranger on their Emmaus Road?