

The Third Sunday of Easter – 2020

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

1 Peter 1:17-25

Luke 24:13-35

I officiated at a wedding the day before yesterday – right here in this holy house. It was glorious. The eyes of the groom dilated as his bride presented herself at the back of the church. She was wearing a summery white gown that flowed with her beautifully as she processed up the center aisle. She was beaming as she arrived at the front of the church. I took in the splendor of the occasion with a full heart. The bride shed more than one tear as the divine essence of marriage was conveyed through the opening statements of the rite of Holy Matrimony. The groom had a catch in his throat as he spoke his marriage vow. The music was riveting. Gentleman Jiggs was there, playing both the organ and the piano. It was a smashing spring afternoon. Michael Bush had made the courtyard immaculate. The most beautiful silver rings I have ever seen were exchanged. The bride's bouquet was colorful, fragrant and elegantly arranged.

There were six of us there; six. I only had to count once. Let's see... there was the bride, the groom, two witnesses, and Jiggs and me (yep, six). But the joy in this house was enough to blow out the doors. The Gospel was proclaimed in all of its splendor. The union of Christ and His bride, the church, was the defining reality which these two reflected in their love and commitment to one another. After the service they recessed out – to an audience of no one, and they were elated. Once at the rear of the church they immediately turned around to face us four who were still in the front. The laughter was abundant. In that sublime moment, all of our shared difficulties melted away. I shall never, never forget it.

Are you tired? Most of us have been standing vigil for the last month and a half. It is a strange way to stand vigil – remaining at home, but that is our common lot. A fatigue is beginning to set in – a fatigue of the heart and mind. This sort of tiredness leaves you feeling flat. Television most assuredly doesn't buoy the spirit. Even the most introverted among us are, at the core, social creatures. Others enrich our lives. We are made for community. God is Triune. St. Augustine, in describing the Trinity spoke this way: God is love. The Father is the Lover, the Son is the Beloved, and the Holy Spirit is the Love that is given and returned. This love that exists within the Holy Trinity is relational. We, made in His image, are likewise made for this marvelous relation. Are you tired? It is for very good reason that you feel this way. As noble as this effort is, as necessary as some say it is, it certainly is having an emotional and spiritual effect.

I suspect that Cleopas and his unnamed companion were tired. These two 'ole boys were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a seven-mile jaunt. They had been through an emotional meat grinder. The elation of Lazarus' resurrection, the jubilation of Palm Sunday, the Messianic enthrall of all that led up to Passover – and then the disillusionment of Christ's arrest, the horrible cries for His blood, the criminal injustice, the head-spinning perversion of torturing a supremely innocent man... Cleopas and his unnamed companion were hammered emotionally, spiritually. A sense of unequalled loss, a dread of the world around them for what they knew was divinely good had been brutally stolen from them. They were tired.

And conflicted. The women had amazed them. Stories of angels and of unused burial ointment; Peter and John had also told them about their empty tomb discovery. But you can sense that they are still tired. After hearing this news, they didn't know what to believe. And then their world changed. On that walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus, their world changed. You've heard of a secret Santa? This is a secret Savior! He holds their eyes from recognizing Him. The risen King walks on their tired road and addresses their tired hearts and brings the light of Easter to their dark and tired minds. The Messianic King walked with them and their world changed. Their conflicted faith comes out first. In this singular conversation with the empty tomb Lord their disappointment comes out first. "We had hoped that He was the One to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). Notice the past tense of the verb – had hoped. Now we no longer hope for redemption for the cross has quite taken that away. It is a tired statement coming from tired believers who have tired hearts and tired minds.

And is Jesus sympathetic? Does He care? What do you think? Does Jesus love these 'ole boys? He loves them enough to die for them. The Lord Christ loves them enough to bear their sin; their lust and their greed and their cowardly faith and their self-centered pride and their indifference to their neighbor's need and their failure to hold to His Word. He loved them. That love was manifest as He bore their sins on the cross. Dying, Jesus grew painfully familiar with their sin and He loved them still. This tired road for the disciples was Sunday. Jesus had walked His own road on Friday. He walked that road for them, for you. Only He walked the road to Calvary, the road you could not walk. He loved Cleopas and the unnamed fellow. He loves you.

And Jesus gave them a verbal slap across their bearded mugs. "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and then enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26). A verbal slap across their tired mugs. Is it unsympathetic? Of course not! Do any of you need a verbal slap across your mug? They say that the first step to get healthy for an alcoholic is for them to admit that they have a problem. We need to admit: we have a tired problem. You and me, by virtue of what we are going through, we are fatigued. This crisis has affected us. We're tired. Jesus knows it. And He is indeed sympathetic.

The secret Savior, what did He do for those 'ole boys? He taught them. He catechized them on the road. He opened the Scripture to them. He refreshed them by speaking the Christological nature of salvation, how it has been fulfilled, what to believe. He taught them what God had planned to do and how it was accomplished. And do you know what it did, this teaching? Do you know what affect it had on them, as they heard it? Their hearts burned. With joy, with vigor, with newfound trust and zeal and happy appreciation – their hearts burned. They couldn't get enough of this Guy, this Teacher, this Traveling Epiphany Man. Cleopas and that unnamed fellow, their fatigue melted away – at hearing this superlative teaching, their tiredness was a forgotten thing and they want the secret Savior to stay with them.

They basically arrived at one of their homes and Jesus acts as if He has miles to go before He sleeps, so those two 'ole boys urge Him strongly: "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is far spent" (Luke 24:29). The secret Savior happily relents. After all, the Divine Service was not yet over, so the secret Savior comes into the house, now a church. The risen Host of the meal takes bread, gives thanks, breaks it and gives it to them and right then, He opens their eyes.

My Lord and my God, My Savior and my God, my Redeemer and my God. Tiredness was overwhelmed by an epiphany that carried them in haste back to Jerusalem. Isaiah's prophecy was realized in two 'ole boys on that first Easter.

Listen to these beautiful Prophetic words and apply them to Cleopas, his unnamed companion and to yourself. "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:28-31). Cleopas and his pal hustled the seven miles back to Jerusalem. Do you think that the tenor of their conversation along the way was different from when they started out for Emmaus earlier that day? Do you think that their hearts, their minds or their spirits were tired?

The Gospel is your strength. God strengthens you... through the Gospel. The Lord is risen from the dead and Easter is the reality that invades the lives of men, your life. He has resolved the principle issue that humanity dreads. Death is defeated. Life is the victor. Heaven awaits. Forgiveness of sins is lavished upon us in abundance. The cross doesn't take away hope; the cross gives it.

Six people in a wedding service knew that Christ was present to extend His life to them and unite a man and a woman in marriage. There was no tiredness in that priceless service. This house is your home. It will await your return. There is strength and joy and vigor and light and hope in this place? Why? Christ and His Word are here. Christ and His meal, His eucharist are here. Christ and His Word are with you. Be of good cheer, beloved of Christ the King. The Lord is with us. He has already resolved this crisis in His death and resurrection. Now He walks with us in the Way. He abides with us. He makes Himself know in the Scripture and the breaking of bread.