

Rev. Meghan Brown  
3rd Sunday in Easter  
Georgetown Presbyterian Church

April 23, 2023  
"Give us Eyes to See"  
Luke 24:13-35

My daughter was 2 years old when she became a big sister. I wanted her to be prepared, so I asked around for advice. People had lots of good suggestions-bring a present home from the hospital and say it's a gift from the newborn; don't have mom hold the baby when the older child meets them for the first time otherwise they'll feel replaced. I hoped whatever nuggets of wisdom I could glean from others and my own intuition would be enough for things to go smoothly. Even so, I was surprised at what actually happened when Inez showed up at the hospital to meet her sister. Her dad holding Lucia, we introduced them-meet your sister, I said, practically with tears in my eyes. What's that over there, Inez asked, pointing to the TV, what's that, looking at the blinds, then the nursing chart, then the window, then the cafeteria tray, proceeding to be curious about everything except the adorable little elephant in the room. Huh, I remember thinking, this is interesting. The next evening, when I came home from the hospital, I came in and left Lucia sleeping in her carseat and joined Inez upstairs for her bedtime. Do you want to see your sister? I asked. Ignoring me, Inez played and talked and then avoided going downstairs for a bedtime snack, as was her usual routine.

Huh, I remember thinking, maybe we have a problem. Vowing to sleep on it, the next morning I was changing Lucia's diaper and she began to cry. From the other room, I heard Inez ask, "Is that the cat meowing?" Oh geez, I thought, really? Much to my surprise, when Inez rounded the corner, her eyes fell on the baby before her. Lucia, she cried! My sister! She said, embracing her! It took her three days to acknowledge her sister's presence. I can only imagine that she wasn't ready to embrace her new reality or identity yet. But from that moment on, she never looked back; now at 9, there is no time when she doesn't remember having a sister. This story came to mind when I thought about Jesus and his continuous attempts to get the people in his life to see and understand that he was the Messiah. For doubting Thomas, it took seeing those stars to believe; for others, we look but don't see, or see but don't understand.

On the Road to Emmaus, we encounter something different; it's not that Cleophas and his companion were unwilling to see Jesus, but that God prevented them from recognizing him. The text tells us that when Jesus joins them on the road, "their eyes were kept from recognizing him." It's not clear why, but God actively prevents them from seeing Jesus in that moment. Brendan Byrne, in "The Hospitality of God," suggests that their recognition of the risen Lord will have to take place within a wider context of

understanding. Like the women at the tomb, they will have to be “reminded” of who the Messiah is, and how wide God’s plan is. Byrne goes on to say that Luke begins a theme here, which becomes prevalent in the Book of Acts, wherein Luke builds up a story by “first describing the experiences of individuals and groups separately, and then brings them together to share their stories.” It’s in the sharing and combining of testimonies that individual experience becomes communal experience, creating a whole new sense of understanding and identity.

Throughout the Gospels, we witness all kinds of people coming to knowledge of salvation in different, hard earned ways. Jesus is almost like a one man band adept at playing every instrument, offering a variety of entry points that lead people to belief. We read about Jesus’ fulfilling prophecies, performing miracles, healings, exorcisms, his transformative preaching, acts of compassion, humility, service, forgiveness, and direct revelation from Jesus himself about who he is. These are some of the many overtures God makes to lead people to knowledge of their salvation. Jesus leaves no stone unturned in coming to us, walking with us, listening to us, and reminding us that he is with us and he loves us. That relentless mission continues in his resurrection because so much hinges on the disciples’ ability to grasp that Jesus is the Messiah-after all, it will be this

community that's responsible for spreading the Gospel from that point on. In order to share their story, they must believe, and in order to believe, they must be convinced that Jesus' identity as the Messiah has life changing consequences-not only in death, but here and now.

When we meet Cleophas and his unnamed companion, there is raw grief and confusion about what has just happened. Jesus' resurrection is not yet clear. When Jesus asks them what they're discussing, they're understandably prickly in their response: "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they go on to tell him, "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people...was handed over to be condemned to death and crucified... we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." What stands out to me is that short, imperfect verb: "We had hoped." The events of the past days brought an end to that habit of hope. Not only are they mourning the loss of their friend, they have lost hope in who the Messiah was and what Jesus would do-for them and their community. "We had hoped that he would redeem Israel." There is deep and overwhelming disappointment in those three words. In his commentary, Byrne notes that "Jesus invites the pair to tell their story...and hears them out, showing respect for the human experience of grief. Jesus

does not interrupt to correct their version of events, but lets them tell their story until the end.” The central issue here remains the Messianic one. How could Jesus, who suffered so terrible a humiliation be the Messiah and Savior of Israel? We had hoped Jesus would liberate us and save us from our enemies. We had hoped that the messiah would make a difference in the face of imperial violence. The gap between their hopes and their current reality seems irreconcilable and they are sad. How many of us can relate to that sentiment? We had hoped that our prayers would be heard. We had hoped that the cancer wouldn’t come back. We had hoped that we’d get a second chance. We had hoped that we would have gotten that interview. We had hoped that we’d have more time. We had hoped that things would get better. We had hoped that God would intervene.

Years ago when I worked as chaplain, I got summoned to the ICU one night. Our hospital, being the only Trauma 1 center in the region, covered vast expanses of rural Georgia, including the North Georgia mountains. That evening, a third generation logger had been brought in after a tree had dislodged from his equipment, falling over 15 feet and hitting him squarely on the head. He lay in his hospital bed, dying, as his wife of over 30 years kept vigil. She asked for prayer and told me story after story of their relationship which had begun in high school. Her grief

was overwhelming-she had spent her whole adult life with this man. She wondered how she would live without him. How she would raise her kids without him. How she would grow old without him. How she would wake up and make breakfast without him. Being a logger is a dangerous profession, they had known the risks, but they had hoped this wouldn't happen to him. She hoped for a miracle that wouldn't come to pass. Soon, she would be forced to cross a bridge-from her previous life to a devastating new reality. But that night, their friends and family, many of them loggers themselves, showed up to sit and keep vigil with her. And when the time came for her to say goodbye, the group held a family meeting and made plans and promises to support her financially and emotionally for as long as she needed. In the midst of her grief and shock, she was held by deep faith and the power of community. Things would never be the same for her. The life she had hoped for was shattered in that accident. She would live a different story from that moment on, and it would not be without grief, but her community's embodiment of God's love was enough for her to experience what I always believed was most miraculous event of all at the hospital-the ability of a family member to say goodbye to their loved one, leave their physical body, and take their first

fragile steps into a new reality. Even in the midst of her husband's death-the small steps forward revealed signs of life, of resurrection for her.

Cleophas and the disciples are also taking their first steps into a new reality. Their vision of a Messiah simply didn't fit with the suffering, humiliation, and death that Jesus experienced, which is why they are so devastated. After Cleophas finishes his story, Jesus tells another story. It's their own story, and it's his story, of course, but Jesus retells it within the wider context of Scripture, "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them the things about himself in scripture," reminding them "was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory" In order to see Jesus for who he is, the disciples must let go of their vision of the Messiah and embrace the risen Lord in front of them. This leap of faith is not without disappointment, not without real grief, fear, and sadness. Byrne writes that "true faith comes when people recognize all that happened to Jesus-his suffering, his death, and now his resurrection-fulfills everything that had been written about the Messiah." Around the table, the disciples finally see Jesus. But even that isn't enough: Jesus is relentless in pursuing the disciples' knowledge of salvation until the very end-he needs them to understand that *God's vision of salvation is much bigger, more expansive, and more inclusive than they-or we- could*

*ever imagine.* Forgiveness, new life, resurrection, redemptive love, and salvation is for all the nations, not just Israel he assures them, before he leaves them for the last time. We had hoped that Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel...By the end, the disciples see Jesus for who he is, and together, they will take steps into a new reality-one without the presence of their beloved friend, but with faith in a Messiah who comes on behalf of the whole world. That forgiveness, new life, resurrection, redemptive love, and salvation: *It's for you and for me, on our best days and our worst days, it's for sinners and doubters, it's for those who are faithful and those who struggle to find faith and those who lose their faith. It is for Thomas who wanted proof and Cleophas who couldn't see, it's for the disciples and for the ones who called to crucify him, it's for you and it's for me. It's for all of us, in all times, for the rest of time.* It doesn't take away the pain of the world, but that knowledge draws us here, to each other, to walk the journey together, to listen to one another, to let down our masks together, to bear testimony to one another, to break bread with one another. And to meet Jesus here: Jesus who makes us a part of this story of salvation and relentlessly reminds us that we are his. Thanks be to God for that. Amen.