

Winfield United Church Reflection – April 19, 2020

“Walk”

Luke 24:13-35

Seven miles we are told... or 11 kms... that was the distance between Jerusalem and Emmaus. This week, I put 11 kms into my apple map and was told that it would take me approximately 2.25 hours to walk that far. I cannot say I can recall ever intentionally setting out on a trek of that length. This past week, however, I can identify with the metaphor of a long walk... when I consider all the things that have happened. Since we left last Sunday, we learned of the sudden passing of Ken from this community... we also heard of the tragedy of unfathomable proportions that took place in Nova Scotia the night before and that morning. We have heard the story unfold, the questions put to authorities, the lament of victims' families. For me, this past week very much feels like an in-between time; a now and not yet space. I feel rather stuck... in between the grief of Good Friday and the hallelujahs of Easter day. It is Holy Saturday where we are keeping vigil... bearing witness to these things that have happened.

And sometimes, the only thing to do is to walk. We walk for all kinds of reasons. To reach a destination instead of driving, to get some much needed fresh air and exercise, to sort out a problem, to have a conversation with another....sometimes it is easier to talk about hard things while you walk and just keep going forward, one foot in front of the other.

Walking is a most underrated spiritual practice in my humble opinion, and I was reminded of that this week. On Friday, morning, I received an email containing a YouTube link to a documentary on the Camino pilgrimage, and many thanks to Margaret for sharing this with me. For those of you unfamiliar, the Camino de Santiago, also known as the Way

of St. James, is a large network of ancient pilgrim routes stretching across Europe and coming together at the tomb of St. James in Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain. The documentary interviewed various pilgrims from all walks of life, and they shared their experience of being on the Camino. And their reasons for doing so were touching... to process grief and loss... to leave one's job for a year to travel and walk... to provide first aid to those in need along the path. I too have been drawn to the Camino and wonder if the day will come when I will go. To have the experience of carrying all your possessions and necessities on your back, looking forward, one foot in front of the other. The documentary spoke to all the benefits of such a journey... to dream, to breathe, to have a spiritual experience, to be changed. And as one pilgrim who undertook the journey himself said, you never walk alone.

Today we hear the story of two pilgrims who are on the Way. They were in Jerusalem the days that saw Jesus arrested and crucified. They also know of the unsettling events from that very morning...of their fellow companion, Mary, going to Jesus' tomb, finding the stone rolled away and his body missing. They have the space of a few hours walk home now to try and sift and sort through these events. There's grief, there's disappointment, as they walk along that dusty road. It's a long walk this evening for Cleopas and his companion. The distance between "we had hoped" and "he is risen" is immense. But then along comes a stranger...someone interested in their conversation and wants to know what it is they are talking about. "How can you not know what has just happened back there? Are you the only one who does know the things that have taken place in Jerusalem?" they ask incredulously. The stranger persists. "What things?" And with this, an invitation to share...to name the hurt, to name the fear, to name the doubt. The two pilgrims are in a place of in-between, of lots of questions and no easy answers. The one who was to be their everything, to deliver them from oppression had just been executed by the system Jesus was to deliver them from.

The resurrected Jesus doesn't give empty platitudes. He doesn't say, it's all good now boys, I'm here! No need to be glum chums. Instead, the stranger invites them to share what's on their hearts and minds. He just listens, and by just listening, he speaks hope into their doubts, their pain, their disappointments.

What happens in this story forms community, albeit, a small one. But doesn't this speak to our current circumstances these past weeks? Big gatherings are not available to us... but small is beautiful. This Easter faith we speak of is full of doubts, of holes in the story. It might even be incomprehensible today in light of the events of this past week. But I focus on the things that bear witness as I find myself in the in-between spaces of this time... of walking side by side (at a safe distance of course), of tables, hospitality, stories, and the experiences of others. The risen Jesus doesn't show up to teach doctrine or pass judgment on doubts but rather enters into our story, our pain, our questions and our longings. Jesus appears in the communion, the coming together, the serving and being served.

The walk is my resurrection moment this week. The people of Nova Scotia, the families affected by the tragedy, the RCMP will go forward, small steps for a time in that they might process and heal and discern. As a community, we will continue to support one another, those who are grieving, fearful and maybe just lamenting the restlessness of this current predicament, with our phone calls, our distant visits while we wait in this in-between time of what has been and what will be. May we walk the way in sharing and wondering together.

Amen and Amen.