

May 8, 2011, Mother's Day

Luke 24: 13-35

Open Eyes, Open Minds

I wish everyone who is a mother and everyone who has ever been loved by a mother, everyone who has been nurtured by a woman whether or not she was your biological mother, and everyone else a Happy Mother's Day!

I spent the week after Easter with my Mom in Todos Santos in Mexico. It was a gift to me to be able to spend so much time with her, just talking and reading, a little shopping and a little walking on the beach.

It was a wonderful vacation! We stayed with my uncle and aunt, and there was no phone reception whatsoever, and I didn't want to keep asking to use my aunt's computer, so I was unplugged. They don't even have a tv, although we did manage to watch a movie and the royal wedding on the computer.

Mostly we read and talked and rested. The house is far from town and the neighbors are at a distance, so it was very quiet. It was easy to pray and find time with God.

But then, last Monday, we got on a plane and came back to California. Only a short, two-hour flight and we were at LAX, with all of the noise and the hassle of going through customs.

Suddenly, we were back and the everyday routine resumed.

The ideal vacation was over. Back to real life.

The two followers of Jesus who were heading toward Emmaus that first Easter Sunday were probably heading back to their former lives and work as well. They had had a great time following Jesus around, listening to him preach and teach, watching as he healed, and hoping that he was the Messiah, the one who would set Israel free from the oppression of the Roman government.

They had watched their source of hope die on a cross.

So hopeless, stunned, grieving, they were leaving the place where their dreams had come crashing down.

They didn't understand what had happened. Their minds were closed to the possibility that it might be true, what the women had said, that Christ was alive!

And with their minds closed, their eyes were blind as well.

It couldn't be Christ walking with them. Christ was dead! No one expects to see a dead man walking on the road, and so they didn't recognize him.

Maybe their hearts were so heavy that they couldn't even look up to see his face. Maybe their eyes were blurry with tears. It's hard to know what caused them to be unable to recognize him.

Last Monday on the plane on the way back from Mexico, my mom and I flew north over the Gulf of California, in between mainland Mexico and Baja. We passed over the Colorado River delta at the northern end of the gulf, and then we saw the Salton Sea.

Both my mom and I are familiar with the eastern part of southern California, but after we saw the Salton Sea, we didn't know what we were looking at any more.

We saw a lake and thought it must be Big Bear Lake, but the mountains didn't look right. We saw a freeway heading north-south and couldn't figure out what freeway it was. We have lived in southern California for most of our lives and yet we didn't recognize it.

What was wrong with our eyes?

Well, of course, we were looking at it from a different perspective than usual. Flying over it is much different from seeing it at ground level. From above, it looks very different.

When the two men, Cleopas and his unnamed travelling companion, were joined by Christ on the road to Emmaus, they were looking at him from a different angle, too. They were probably used to sitting in a large group, facing him, watching him from farther away, or following behind him on the road. Maybe they had never walked alongside him before.

Or maybe they didn't really look at him because they were so wrapped up in grief and shock, because they didn't expect to see the one who had been crucified up and walking with them on the road to Emmaus.

My mom and I finally recognized where we were when we saw the ocean, and then we could see I-5 along the coast and other landmarks that told us we were looking at Camp Pendleton. As we flew up the coast, we recognized harbors and tall buildings, the blimp hangars at the air base in Tustin, and John Wayne airport.

Without the ocean, without something so big and so unmistakable, we could not tell where we were.

And until the followers of Christ saw him break bread, something they had seen him do in such a unique and unmistakable way before his death, they didn't know who he was.

Just as seeing the ocean opened our eyes to where we were last Monday, seeing Christ bless the bread, break it and share it was their landmark, their moment of recognition.

And then they could look back on the discussion on the road and realize, in retrospect, all of what he explained about the scriptures was about him. All of the prophecies, all of the wisdom, was about him.

And even though it was late, and the roads were not safe after dark, They jumped up and they ran the seven miles back to Jerusalem to share their good news with the other disciples. They couldn't wait till morning!

They had left the fellowship of the other disciples in fear and grief, evidently wanting to be separated from the others and go back to their old lives, and here they were, back the very same day, excited and joyful.

They had seen the Lord, risen just as he said!

If we continue reading the scripture past where I stopped earlier, we find out that Christ appeared to his disciples in Jerusalem while Cleopas and his friend were trying to tell them about recognizing him when he broke the bread. Just as he disappeared when they recognized him in Emmaus, now he appears as they are telling about their experience!

And then Christ opened their minds to understand the scriptures---to know the true meaning of God's word.

After three years of travelling with Christ, hearing him teach and preach and talk, watching him heal and multiply loaves and fishes and feed the hungry, there was still a lot they didn't understand.

And after more years than that of knowing Christ, for most of us, we still don't understand. We still fail to understand the meaning of the scriptures.

We still fail to recognize Christ as he walks along with us in our ordinary, everyday lives.

Our eyes are still blind. Our minds are still closed.

Today is the third Sunday of Easter. Have we already forgotten that Christ came to live among us and take the worst suffering that people can cause one another because he loves the world so very much?

Have we already forgotten that Christ is alive? And that when he ascended into heaven, he gave us the Holy Spirit to be our comforter, our advocate, our power and our peace?

Have we already forgotten? Or maybe we never really knew. Maybe Easter was just a nice family day with chocolate and eggs.

Do we live as though Easter is for real? As though Christ is alive?

Or are we once again living in the darkness of the shadow of death?

Think about it a minute. Pause and remember what has happened in your life over the past week or two.

Just think it through-----

Now, where have you seen the risen Christ? When have you experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit?

Do you recognize the risen Christ walking beside you on your journey? What is he doing? What is he saying to you?

Do you hear his words of comfort? Do you feel the peace that he gives? What did you need to hear that somehow you have heard, that you have felt deep in your heart at just the moment you needed it?

Do you feel your eyes opening? Your mind understanding? Do you feel your heart burning within you as you realize who has been with you on the road?

If you cannot recognize Christ, continue your journey until you reach your own place called Emmaus.



Keep travelling until you get there! Don't forget to take a friend to go with you! Remember, even if you do not recognize the presence of Christ in your everyday life yet, you are among people who do. Listen to their stories of meeting the risen Christ.

As you listen, maybe you will see Christ standing right in front of you.

This is the blessing of fellowship with other Christians.

And don't forget that Christ makes himself known in the breaking of bread. Of course, this means Holy Communion, which we celebrate on the first Sunday of every month.

But it also means in every day meals. Providing the sustenance for our bodies every day is a metaphor for the way that Christ provides for our spiritual needs. The bread and water that nourish our bodies can be reminders that Christ is the Bread of Life and the Living Water for our souls if we take time to remember that whenever we eat and drink.

The risen Lord is among us and within us.

When we cannot recognize him, when we don't have time to spend in the desert being quiet, we can look for landmarks that are as unmistakable as the ocean.

Landmarks like fellowship with each other.

Like watching a child give a flower to his mother, or a kiss to her dad.

Like a deep inner peace in the middle of a trying time.

Like Holy Communion.

And so many more landmarks, some of which might be very personal to you.

Christ is walking right beside you. Let him open your eyes to recognize him