

# Homily for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

April 25-26, 2020

Readings: Acts 2: 14, 22-33; 1 Peter 1: 17-21; Luke 24: 13-35

Preacher: Deni Mack

Cleopas and his partner are unaware Jesus is walking with them. Years ago in New York City as I clutched our children's hands and pushed the stroller, a man asked me for money. As I hurried the children forward, five year old Steve said, "Mom why don't you give him some money?" I answered, "Oh Steve, I only have enough money for the subway and to get us all in the UN building." Steve said, "Why don't you give him our lunch?" I responded, "Oh Steve, if I give him our lunch, I'll have to go back to your uncle's apartment to make more and we'll be too late for the tour of the UN."

That man who asked for money stayed with me. He was planted firmly on my conscience. As we rode the subway and toured the UN the man's face never left my mind. Amazingly, that evening when my husband ran into a store to get ice cream, that same man stuck his head through the open window of our car and asked again. His pleading face has been with me all these years. I had tried to ignore Jesus in the stranger; I had tried to ignore Jesus in the hungry; I wasn't listening to Jesus in the voice of my five-year-old son. I guess I thought I could put Jesus on hold for a more convenient time. Like church on Sunday morning.

Remembering the look in his eyes, the exact words, their cadence, I asked God, "What are you trying to tell me?" And everything changed. For 52 years I've known Jesus in that needy man was asking me to be compassionate, to be hospitable, to be generous, to be aware of his constant presence not only on the streets of New York but right here and right now. Jesus was and is opening the scriptures to us everywhere. He nudges us to listen, to open our hearts to him.

Those two disciples who did not recognize Jesus in the stranger walking with them were distracted by grief over Jesus' death; they had not quite believed the women's report that he had risen or they would have been out looking for him. You know how it is when our hopes and dreams are shattered. Our grief can make us impenetrable to any consolation. Or like

me leading our children through the wonders of New York City—my agenda was impenetrable; no stranger could mess with my plans.

I learned God keeps on walkin' with us even when we are spiritually shut down. I sometimes am that preoccupied New York City tourist even now in the midst of the pandemic. Some times I check email rather than call our parishioners to ease isolation, to listen to them with my heart, to communicate Jesus' love, to be church in this pandemic. I do believe Jesus is walking with us as we disinfect handles, drawer pulls, faucets, door nobs, keyboards, remote controls and phones.

God is with us as we don our facial protection mask and surely as we listen to our children, our spouse, our neighbors 6-feet apart. Am I *listening to Jesus*? Am I letting his words burrow into my mind, sink into my soul, affect my spirit? Am I letting Jesus in? Maybe we're more like Cleopas and his partner during this pandemic than we thought. The couple walking to Emmaus were grieving the death of Jesus, the one who changed their lives! Now they did not know what to believe.

Some women had told them the tomb was empty. Their confusion distracted them from connecting the stranger walking with them with the scriptures he was explaining. And then their hearts opened; they were moved with compassion. Realizing the stranger could use a meal and a bed; they invited him to stay.

That is key: recognizing needs, inviting Jesus to stay. As we ask Jesus' help our attention is drawn to vulnerabilities and disparities as Covid 19 sickens black and brown people at a higher rate than whites due to asthma-inducing chemical treatment plants in red-lined neighborhoods, inaccessible health care, food deserts, overpriced medicine and more. We also learn of clear skies and people breathing fresh air in New Delhi and Los Angeles for the first time in many years. Jesus helps us see needs, their causes and effects and even the results of shutting down pollution. As we seek the changes necessary to alleviate suffering Jesus walks with us through this pandemic and beyond.