

# Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Easter

April 17-18, 2021

Readings: Acts 3:13-15,17-19; 1 John 2:1-5a; Luke 24:35-48

Preacher: Deirdre McKiernan Hetzler

Today's gospel begins: "The two disciples recounted what had taken place on the way..." Whoa! On the way? To where? And what took place? Like many of the Scripture passages excerpted for Mass, this statement needs context.

Clopas and another disciple (probably his wife, whom John tells us stood at the foot of the cross) were trudging home to Emmaus that awful Friday. Devastated. The One they thought was the Messiah was dead. The crucifixion had destroyed their hopes for Israel's redemption.

Then a stranger came alongside and interpreted for them all the Scriptures about the Messiah. About the continuity of God's faithfulness through the centuries. As evening approached, they invited him to stay and eat with them. Then they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. And rushed back to tell the others.

As they are sharing their story, Jesus suddenly appears in their midst. They were startled and terrified, Luke says. Who wouldn't be startled at the sudden appearance of the dead? But terrified, too? Of a ghost? Or, as some suggest, was it their feelings of guilt for having abandoned him?

But there's no recrimination from Jesus. He patiently explains how what was written in the Scriptures had to be fulfilled. "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. And that repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name to all the nations..." Jesus' earthly ministry had addressed repentance: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near." "Repent and believe the good news."

In our first reading, Peter calls the crowd to repent for handing Jesus over to be executed. In the second reading, John assures us that, even if we do sin, Jesus advocates for us. Not only for us, but the whole world. The Divine

bringing liberation. From guilt. And fear. In the words of the medieval mystic, Julian of Norwich, "...in all this [failure], the sweet eye of [God's] kindness and love never leaves us, nor does compassion."

Even as John assures us that Jesus is for us, he insists we come to know Jesus by keeping his commandments. And what might they be? To love! In the end, it's all about love. "Love one another as I have loved you," Jesus commanded. "Love one another as I have loved you." That's a tall order, isn't it? Jesus' love cost him his life, after all! But Jesus' Spirit, poured out on us, can make this love possible.

"What does love look like?" St. Augustine once asked. "It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of people." As members of God's family, we are to love everyone. To wish them shalom. Whether or not we like or agree with them. No exceptions.

This pandemic has offered us many opportunities to reach out in love. As simple as bringing flowers to someone having a rough day. Calling a shut-in. Sending a note. Delivering a meal to a busy mom, balancing working from home with schooling kids. Wearing that darn mask to protect others.

Love also demands we tackle the critical issues of our time: Racism. Climate change. Xenophobia. To name a few. They can seem overwhelming. But the longest journey begins with a single step. Speaking out and speaking up. One step will lead to another. Sometimes, it will cost us. Sometimes, we will fail. But, not to worry. The sweet eye of kindness and love never leaves us, nor does compassion. Jesus is the unending reservoir of forgiveness and abundance of love.

We celebrate that love and forgiveness at the Eucharistic table. Where Jesus, about to pour out his life for us, says "Do this in memory of me." I have always heard that as an invitation for Jesus' disciples to pour out our lives, as well. I believe we are called to be taken, blessed, broken and given, as Jesus was. To be Eucharist for others, even as we receive strength from the Eucharist. Here, in community, we are empowered for that mission.

