



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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ISAIAH 51:1-6; PSALM 34:1-10; 1 PETER 1:17-23; LUKE 24:13-35

STAY WITH US

In reviewing my recent sermons, I think we should promote them as a series called “True Confessions of Canon Rich.” On March 8th when I was preaching on the woman at the well, I came out as a recovering alcoholic. On Good Friday, I told you about my relationship with Jean Donovan, one of the El Salvadoran martyrs. Today, I must disclose to you that I am recovering from something else. I am a recovering intellectual. There’s nothing wrong with being an intellectual at all. But when I was in the seminary, I consistently got feedback that I only lived within my head, preferring esoteric concepts to feelings. Some classmates even questioned my ability to do pastoral work, and they wondered whether I could ever connect with real people in a parish. During my training to become a hospital chaplain, I confronted this head on. I learned that I lived in my head because it was a safe space for me. I feared intimacy with others

and certainly didn’t want people to see my wounds, my pain, or my weaknesses. I was afraid to be vulnerable and felt an unhealthy need to project an image of competency and perfection at all costs.

Some of you might be surprised by this because this is not how I move through the world today. I am an off the scale intuitive feeler (“NF”) on the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator. My primary role in the parish is pastoral care, as I unabashedly explore your feelings, wounds, and vulnerabilities while also sharing my own. Why am I telling you this? Because I’m about to relapse in this sermon!

One of my favorite science writers is Michael Pollan. I just became aware of a new book he wrote called *A World Appears*. I haven’t read it yet, but I heard about it as I listened to an interview he had with Ezra Klein. The book is about the

realm of consciousness, how we know what we know. When I was studying philosophy, we called this epistemology. What I find intriguing is that brain researchers are exploring the organic and physiological questions that philosophy has been grappling with for millennia. What is consciousness and how do we know what we know? Here's the scoop. Scientists are finding that consciousness probably starts in the body and moves to the brain.

Without the body, it isn't clear that we would have consciousness at all. For consciousness to emerge, we don't need language, but we do need vulnerability, suffering, maybe even mortality. "The body is thinking on its own, feeling on its own, reacting to its environment in a million different ways," Pollan notes. Once you understand that—that 90 percent of what the brain-body connection is doing never enters the conscious mind—it "totally changes what you think about consciousness." At the end of the day, whatever else it might be, consciousness is an embodied phenomenon.

I find this fascinating, but it also resounds with my experience of being a person who no longer just lives in his head. When I listen to many of you describe the movement of God in your lives or how you are discerning life questions, you describe an embodied experience. Often you tell me about "feeling the Spirit" or having sudden tears or being "moved" or becoming

"emotional." The experience of embodied consciousness is all over our Gospel story today. The story begins on the road to a village that is about seven miles from Jerusalem. Two disciples are absorbed in talking about the events that have taken place—so absorbed we can imagine that they don't even notice where they are on the dusty road in the twilight. They are so absorbed that they don't notice that Jesus has come to walk beside them. They tell this stranger all that has happened, and Jesus gives his lengthy response that touches their minds, going through "Moses and all the prophets, interpreting to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:27). But despite this exhaustive appeal to the intellect, there is no breakthrough, no transformation, just words.

The transformation begins when the disciples say, "Stay with us" (24:29), and the transformation continues as Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. With these gestures, "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him" (24:31). Immediately, he vanishes from their physical sight. To me, the most beautiful part of the story is when the disciples exclaim, "were not our hearts burning within us!" (24:32). I identify with this. I've experienced it. The disciples remember what their hearts had known before their minds could become aware. They remember the sensation of burning they had when Jesus was speaking to them on the road: the sensation of the truth as it

began to work its way from their bodies to their minds.

So, for me the spiritual is deeply entwined with the sensory. This is what it means to believe in the Incarnation. God comes to us in our bodies. This is the way of sacrament. Jesus continues to come to us in our fleshy existence. We attune ourselves to the bodily so we can have the spiritual knowledge we desire.

Two things happen to these disciples through their encounter with Jesus in the breaking of the bread. The first is that the sensation of truth, begun in the body, enters their minds and breaks them open with astonishment. The second is that they come to see themselves in the story. This is no longer a telling of abstract events that took place among some people of their acquaintance. It is living, breathing presence, and it fills them with awe.

The story of the road to Emmaus is about the spiritual journey, an embodied, sensory, enfleshed journey. A story where Jesus shows up, in the flesh, to accompany us and reveal God to us in a new way. It's no surprise that this original journey took place on the day of the Resurrection—the first Easter Sunday.

This is also the story of our Eucharistic liturgy. Isn't what we do here each Sunday just like the embodied road to Emmaus? We gather on Sunday—Resurrection Day, and we begin connecting with each other. If you get to church early you might catch

up with friends, meet new people, and talk about your week. We “talk with each other about all the things that had happened” (24:14). We hear the stories that our ancestors in the faith have handed on to us—Moses, the prophets, the psalmists, the letter writers, and we hear stories about Jesus. And then the preacher attempts to do what Jesus did on the road. She grounds our experience and story in memory, tradition, history, and Scripture. We travelers are invited to comprehend our place in a narrative that long precedes us, a narrative big enough to hold all the messiness of our lives. When Jesus tells the story, the death of the Messiah finds its place in a sweeping, cosmic arc of redemption, hope, and divine love that spans the centuries.

And at the offertory, we invite Jesus to “stay with us” (verse 29). It's an invitation—a welcome—a plea. They are the words that Jesus waits to hear. And then we do such a simple thing. We gather around a table. Just like Jesus did, our priest takes, blesses, breaks, and gives. Such a small a thing. So small a thing that changes everything. We are invited to trust in the transformative power of small things. A bit of bread. A sip of wine. A common table. A shared meal.

But the Emmaus story speaks to this power - the power of the small and the commonplace to reveal the divine. God shows up during a quiet evening walk on a backwater road. God is made known

around our dinner tables. God reveals God's self whenever we take, bless, break, and give. God is present in the rhythms and rituals of our seemingly ordinary days.

If the Emmaus story tells us anything, it tells us that the risen Christ is not confined in any way by the seeming smallness of our lives. Wherever and whenever we make room, Jesus comes. The stranger who is the Savior meets us in the flesh on the lonely road to Emmaus. God comes to us as food that we consume. I can't imagine a more powerful embodiment. We take God into our very flesh because we are already God's flesh in the world. The guest who becomes our host still nourishes us with Presence, Word, and Bread.

So, keep walking, my friends. Keep telling the story. Keep honoring the stranger. Keep attending to your burning heart. For Christ is risen. He is no less risen on the road to Emmaus than he is anywhere else. So, look for him. Listen for him. And when he lingers at your door, yearning to feed you, say what he longs to hear: *Stay with me.*

LUKE 24:13-35 *[Now on that same day two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.]*