

Their Eyes Were Opened

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This Easter we have gathered to hear again an old story, a story that the apostles first thought was “an idle tale.” An idle tale because the first witnesses of the empty tomb were women and women’s testimony was not to be trusted. Or perhaps because the idea of a risen Jesus was so outlandish, so impossible to grasp, that the men in the group denied even the possibility. They could not believe the women until they saw the linen clothes, strewn on the floor of the tomb.

And again, the Gospel of Luke tells us, later that same day two of the followers of Jesus did not open their eyes to see that Jesus was with them, walking on the road to Emmaus. They saw and heard what they expected to see and hear – a stranger, wandering the countryside, ignorant of their sorrow and asking them to tell their story. They said “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days.” Basically, they gave him a “Hello! Don’t you know anything?”

They saw and heard what they expected to see and hear even when Jesus rebuked them for their ignorance and lack of faith. Even when he taught them his interpretation of the Scriptures, as the wise Rabbi he was, they saw and heard only the teachings. They could not imagine that the teacher was their own Jesus, the one who had died.

There are many stories in all of the Gospels in which the disciples are made out to be thick headed and slow of heart. It seems like they are always just behind the storyline, never really understanding what is happening and what their place is in the drama. This resurrection story is another one of those moments.

But let's give the disciples their due. Although they did not "know" who Jesus was, they also did not pass him by on the road to Emmaus. Jesus had taught them that hospitality is next to godliness and that it was their duty to extend themselves to the stranger. And so they took this stranger into their confidence. They opened their hearts to him and told him about their disappointment and their grief. They said "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" but instead he had been tortured and crucified. And to make matters worse, his body, their last hold on him, had disappeared.

They opened their hearts to this stranger. And when he was about to take leave of them they extended themselves again and invited him to take a meal with them and to stay the night. And so Jesus, who entered life as a newborn, being rejected by the innkeepers, and sleeping his first night in a stable, was now taken into the inn by the disciples. They were ignorant of his identity but they had learned how to treat a stranger who you meet on the road. And so the teachings of Jesus began to have their own life. The teachings of Jesus resurrected.

When Jesus accepted the invitation to eat with the two disciples he thanked them by offering a blessing over their bread. And in the breaking and the blessing of the bread their eyes were opened and they recognized the gesture. They recognized that this blessing was like the blessing of the loaves and the fishes. They recognized that this blessing was like the blessing at the Passover Supper. They recognized, in a flash, that the one who they loved, who had died and was taken away, was in their presence. And in the moment they saw and heard the truth, he was gone.

Let me share a poem with you about such recognitions. Mary Oliver is a poet who lives on Cape Cod. Much of her poetry is about being awakened by the beauty of the world around her. In this poem she takes

on the stories of the miracles and asks us to accept, just for now, that miracles happen. She says:

Why wonder about the loaves and the fishes?
If you say the right words, the wine expands.
If you say them with love
And the felt ferocity of that love
And the felt necessity of that love,
The fish explode into many.
Imagine him, speaking,
And don't worry about what is reality,
Or what is plain, or what is mysterious.
If you were there, it was all those things.
If you can imagine it, it is all those things.
Eat, drink, be happy.
Accept the miracle.
Accept, too, each spoken word
Spoken with love.¹

And so today I ask you to enter into the story. Be there for a moment. Be there in your own life. When the stranger asks you, what are you sad about or what brings you joy, accept that stranger into your life and take a risk to open your heart. Easter is a reminder that sometimes we need to be willing to step outside the box, to imagine what is unimaginable and accept each spoken word that is spoken with love. Easter is a reminder that the teachings live on in each of us if we are willing to take them seriously. Mary Oliver tells us that reality is built on

¹ *Logos* from Why I Wake Early by Mary Oliver

imagination. Today, this Easter morning, let your hearts and minds expand and imagine that you have been given a gift of insight. Imagine that your hearts and minds have been opened and a new day, a new way, is born.