

The First Sunday of Easter: Wake Up!
Laurie Ruby

Last Sunday we celebrated Easter and Christ's marvelous, glorious resurrection from the grave. We sang the hymns, awed over the lovely Easter flowers that adorned the Sanctuary, and then many of us went home to eat delicious Easter meals with our families. Then the next morning, it was back to reality and back to work (and school) we went. With everything going on in the world, our nation, our community we can easily forget the Resurrection feeling and joy we had in our hearts last week. We can easily forget the promises God has made us and the assurance that we can have in him through Christ's death and resurrection. On this side of the Resurrection it can be easy to forget the agony, confusion, and pain the disciples and followers of Jesus felt when their Lord disappeared. They too, like us, forgot the words of Christ himself and the teachings of the Scriptures. They needed an awakening, to wake up. Let's pray: *Heavenly Father, as we turn to your word and the teachings it has for us today may our eyes be open to see your movement, our ears be open to hear your words, and our hearts be open to accept your grace and love. Amen.*

It's a Monday morning. It is still dark out, but birds are beginning to awaken outside. You are laying all cozy and warm in your bed, when something terrible happens. Your alarm clock goes off! You silence the alarm by either turning it off completely or maybe you are one of those people who hits the snooze button several times. Some people may even set several alarms in order to get out of bed in the morning (I myself have had a tendency of doing so). For those morning people among us waking up in the morning is not that big of a deal. In fact, you may be ready or excited to start your day. For those of us who are not morning people, waking up in the morning is a long drawn out ordeal. If we do get out of bed, we are essentially half asleep walking zombies, at least I am. I am convinced my brain does not function at full capacity until at least 9:30 a.m. Sometimes you just cannot function right in the morning. You feel like you are in a haze and you are not completely sure what is going on. Sure, you may be up walking around and getting ready to go to work, but you are not fully awake. I think the followers of Christ were in this state of not being fully awake after his death and disappearance from the tomb.

Let's turn to our main text for the day, Luke 24: 13-32. *"Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?' They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one living in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened there in these days?' 'What things?' he asked. 'About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied, 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.' He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going on farther. But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So, he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'"*

These disciples walked about seven miles with Jesus and did not even know it. They could have been so focused on their pain and their confusion that they were kept from seeing Jesus for who he was. They could have been too deep in their disappointment that Jesus was not who they hoped him to be and then to make matters worse, his body disappeared. They were struck with grief and despair. Walking around in a haze, not sure what to make of the events that unfolded over the past few days and hours. Then they meet a stranger on the road who joins in on their discussion. Did you notice their body language when Jesus comes up to them? Verse 17, *"They stood still, their faces downcast."* You can tell they are in despair because they cannot even bring themselves to look upon this stranger. They most likely would rather have him go away so they do not have to relive the trauma. However, Cleopas shoots back, maybe a little sarcastically, *"Are you the only one living in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened there in these days?"* Today it would be something like, "where have you been the last few days, living under a rock?" Little did they know who they were speaking to and who would walk with them down the road.

The conversation continues and the two followers of Jesus share what they had hoped would happen and who Jesus was. *"It's all about the man named Jesus of Nazareth. He was a mighty prophet who did amazing miracles and preached powerful messages in the sight of God and everyone around. Our chief priests and authorities handed him over to be executed – crucified, in fact. We had been hoping that he was the One – you know, the One who would liberate all Israel and bring God's promises. Anyway, on top of all this, just this morning – the third day after the execution – some women in our group really shocked us. They went to the tomb early this morning, but they didn't see his body anywhere. Then they came back and told us they did see something – a vision of heavenly messengers – and these messengers said that Jesus was alive. Some people in our group went to the tomb to check it out, and just as the women had said, it was empty. But they didn't see Jesus. (Voice Translation)"* It is easy to see that what they had hoped would happen did not turn out the way they expected it to. In his commentary on the gospel of Luke, R. Kent Hughes writes, "They were so depressed and so negative in their confusion that it was beyond their capacity to make the obvious connections." It was inconceivable to them that Jesus had been raised from the dead, even though Jesus was right there with him on the road to Emmaus.

Isn't this true of our own lives? We get so stuck in our circumstances not working out the way we want them to that we are kept from seeing Jesus alongside us. We get stuck in the haze, confusion, what do we do now questions of dashed hopes. We muddle along the road discussing the events of our lives, trying to make sense of them. What do you mean the cancer is back? Where are we going to get the money to pay these bills? How am I supposed to work full-time and complete these assignments and still have time for my family? Why was there another mass shooting in our nation? We think we have to figure these questions out alone, but Jesus walks alongside us just like he did the disciples. Jesus entered into their conversation where they were at. He entered into their despair and walked alongside them. Jesus comes alongside us in our despair, confusion, and sadness as well. He walks with us along the road, but are we awake enough to notice?

The disciples were not awake enough to notice, but soon enough their eyes would start to begin to open. Jesus begins with a rebuke, *"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"* And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." This is interesting because instead of just revealing himself to them at this moment, he points back to the Scriptures. Jesus doesn't come straight out like "Surprise! It's me Jesus!". He begins to reveal himself over time. He explains to them why it had to happen like this and how it was foretold. During the explanation, they began to see the Scriptures anew, like they never heard it before. Their despair began to melt away. Hughes writes this, "As the incognito Christ was expounding the Scriptures, the two had come to see the plausibility, and indeed the necessity, of the Passion and Resurrection. Now they began to understand why the tomb was empty. I think they were divinely kept from recognizing Christ so they would base their understanding of the Resurrection squarely on the Scripture and not on experience. A privileged

experience such as this, if not grounded in the Word, runs a danger of becoming a privatized, eccentric interpretation. The couple on the road, however, were in no such danger. Their belief in the Resurrection rested on the Scriptures before they saw Christ!" The disciples needed to believe in the Resurrection without seeing the Risen Christ. They needed to be strengthened by the Scriptures so they could fully understand what the Resurrection meant. They needed to be reminded of what they had been told. They needed to remember God's word and begin to trust again that what God says will come to pass. As they were reminded of these things, the fog had begun to lift. They began to slowly wake up.

The two disciples and Jesus finally get to their destination and after such an engaging discussion, they invited Jesus to stay. Jesus agrees and at the blessing and breaking of bread the disciples' eyes were opened. Maybe they finally saw his nail scarred hands or maybe they were taken back to the feeding of the 5,000 or the breaking of the bread at the Passover meal. Whatever it was, this simple act was an act of revelation. They finally, fully recognized Jesus and at the exact time that they knew him Jesus disappeared. They finally realized it was him and then he was gone. Can you imagine what thoughts would be racing through your mind? "How did we not see it?" "Did that just happen?" They might have been excited, relieved, rejuvenated. "No wonder he could explain to us about the Messiah. He was/is the Messiah!" They were fully awakened. Their eyes were opened!

The question remains for us, though, are we living awake in light of the Resurrection or do we need to wake up? Do we need to wake up to see God's promises fulfilled in our lives? Do we need to wake up to see God's grace in our lives? Do we need to wake up to see those around us who need to hear about Christ's love and sacrifice for them? Are we missing what is right in front of us because of our own despair, grief, pride, shame, etc.?

It can be so easy to walk around asleep in today's world. To walk around numb to the pain, suffering, frustrating circumstances and think that nothing is ever going to change. We might as well accept it for what it is. But it is this kind of thinking that causes us to keep living in the fog. It was this kind of thinking that caused slavery in America to continue to exist and be endorsed by the Church in the 1800s. It is this kind of thinking which perpetuates hatred and racism. It is this kind of thinking which keeps people living in despair and apathy. The Resurrection goes against this thinking. The Resurrection wakes people up!

We need to be people who truly live in the light of the Resurrection. We need to wake up! God is continually doing new things and providing new blessings in our lives. God is continually with us in our lives. He is moving through us, in us, around us. He is a God of awakening, providing wake up calls to his people. Sometimes his wake-up calls are small, simple like the breaking of bread with the two disciples in Emmaus. It may be a gentle breeze on a summer day when we notice the beauty of creation around us. It could be a telephone call from an unexpected friend when you just need someone to talk to. Sometimes God's wake-up calls are big, dramatic, and possibly traumatic like Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. That wake-up call was blinding, but it was transforming. Those wake-up calls may be an incident which causes you to re-evaluate your life. Or it could be a devastating hurricane which leaves your home in shambles. Last October, we sent 14 members to Houston, TX with Samaritan's Purse to begin the rebuild process after Hurricane Harvey. We were able to meet some wonderful homeowners during our week-long trip, and several of the houses in which we worked on are now finished and dedicated. If you remember, one homeowner we got to grow close with was George. George has a magnetic personality and his love for Christ overflows to those around him. In January, a few of us got to visit with George again. A few weeks ago, George's home was officially completed and dedicated. Listen to what he had to say during his dedication. "Thank God for the storm because without the storm we wouldn't know the Lord like we do."

God is calling us to wake up and to notice Him walking down the road with us. Let's take some time and think about everything you did yesterday. Think about your day, about the people you met, the things you did or did not do, the places you went. Now think about where God was in your day. Can you notice him there with you? Can you feel the love that he has for

you? No matter what stage we are at in our lives we need to wake up to the reality that God loved us so much that he sent Christ to die for us. Jesus saw us for who we really are and gave up his life for us. This is amazing! He trampled over death and sin so that we could have freedom with him! Paul Washer sums up the reality of the situation. He writes, "I have given Christ countless reasons not to love me. None of them has changed his mind." We need to wake up and live in this truth. Christ died for us, Christ was buried for us, Christ rose again for us, and Christ lives today and is coming back for us! This in itself should awaken our souls, our lives. We need to live each day remembering Christ's love for us and this changes the way we live.

It will change our perspective of things going on in our lives. No longer do we need to walk around in despair, suffering, and shame because Christ gives us the victory through his death and resurrection. Like that old hymn, *Jesus Paid It All*, says, *Jesus paid it all/ All to him I owe/ Sin had left a crimson stain/ He washed it white as snow*. Jesus Christ did pay it all! Everything we need can be found in him and he gives it to us freely. I know that most of us are tired of the snow and we are more than ready for warmer weather to get here. However, one of the blessings that snow gives us is the reminder of God's grace and mercy in our lives. The blood of Jesus has made us whiter than snow. Isn't that amazing! When we believe in Christ we are made whiter than snow. Snow makes everything a little brighter because it reflects light. We, the Body of Christ, are called to make the world brighter by reflecting the Light, Jesus. How can we do this if we do not recognize him in our lives? We need to wake up fully and notice Christ among us. Amen.

*Let no one caught in sin remain
Inside the lie of inward shame
We fix our eyes upon the cross
And run to Him who showed great love
And bled for us
Freely You've bled for us*

*Christ is risen from the dead
Trampling over death by death
Come awake, come awake
Come and rise up from the grave*

*O death, where is your sting?
O hell, where is your victory?
O church, come stand in the light
The glory of God has defeated the night*

*Sing it, o death, where is your sting?
O hell, where is your victory?
O church, come stand in the light
Our God is not dead, He's alive, He's alive*

*Christ is risen from the dead
Trampling over death by death
Come awake, come awake
Come and rise up from the grave*