

Easter... we are all looking for hope, for new life. Like the two disciples on that road to Emmaus, we too can be very discouraged with our lives, or the world around us. New Testament scholar William Barclay makes the interesting point that Emmaus is west of Jerusalem, and that it was late in the day, near supper time, so the disciples were heading into a setting sun. Somehow they were blinded, perhaps by the sun, perhaps blinded by their own grief over Jesus death, blinded so that “their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” (They told Jesus that some of the “*women* of their group” had found his tomb empty and had seen visions of angels who said he was alive.)

But the two men were blinded with sadness, or really didn’t believe the empty tomb story, so they saw the risen Jesus as a stranger! Jesus then gives them a little Bible lesson about Moses and the prophets... He probably mentioned Isaiah’s words about the “suffering servant,” a man “well-acquainted with grief” who can lead and heal the people... he taught them that such a Messiah (anointed one) must suffer before entering into glory.

Jesus was teaching that new life can be born out of trials and suffering... and that it could even be necessary for healing and transformation. We know in conflict resolution we have to name the conflict, name the hurts, be able to forgive hurts... be open to come to new understandings. This stranger (Jesus) that came up alongside the two sad disciples allows them to vent all their feelings about losing their teacher, the one they had hoped would save Israel. Jesus was always teaching the way of nonviolence, telling his followers to put away the sword. He teaches them that the Messiah would not be a military king, but a suffering servant, who would show people how to love one another, rather than continue the cycle of retaliations and never-ending war.

Hope for our world is found in loving one another, having goodwill for our neighbors, *all* our neighbors! And because there is so much hatred and violence in our world, we need to be awake and alert to every bit of goodness and new life that we can find. (We cannot find the physical Jesus whenever we want...The tomb was *empty* and his appearances did come to an end. At that supper table in Emmaus, he disappeared right after the breaking of bread.) So... all followers of Jesus are called to recognize him *in Spirit*, as *divine Spirit*, wherever there is new life.

Let's think for a few moments about the many ways we sense his spirit, as Divine Presence. One way that anyone can identify with is the *cycle of Nature*, of life to death to life. We are all watching plants and tree branches, that appear dead in the winter, sprout and blossom with new life. We love the early blossoms of the crocus, the daffodil, the forsythia! There is a hidden life in everything, a spark ready to be ignited, even in the winter.

Another amazing part of nature is *the sun* itself. After the dark night, there is such beauty in sunrise at dawn. The sun symbolizes light and *warmth*. Those at the evening meal, were so sad, but they found in this stranger the loving *warmth* of breaking and sharing bread.

Music is one of the deepest vehicles for spirit in worship gatherings. Good music is always uplifting, but tying it to beautiful lyrics is even more inspiring...I want to share with you part of a song that always gives me an Easter feeling. When I'm feeling down, when my eyes and heart are downcast, like those two disciples... besides mellow or sad songs, I sometimes play songs that are very upbeat, where the music pulls us in, moves us forward, gives new energy, new courage and new life. Here is part

of the Ken Medema song (he's coming next week!) called "Lift Up Your Eyes!"

Chorus: Lift up your eyes to the rising of the sun. Soon comes the day when the races of earth will be run. We'll shed the chains of all our fear, The mornin's coming' and it's almost here. Lift up your eyes to the rising of the sun!

*What will it be when the morning comes, to waken frozen spring?
The dark of night becomes the light of day, and the whole creation
sings! Blind then will see and deaf then will hear, and darkness will
be put away. Then we shall walk in a world made new, as children of
the day!* **Chorus, LIFT UP YOUR EYES TO THE RISING OF THE
SUN!**

One sure way to recognize the Presence, the spirit of Jesus, a rising sun of new life, is when there is a letting go of anger, of desire for retaliation. At the heart of the gospel is the message of forgiveness (Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us). When we remember that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," we practice forgiveness regularly, both for ourselves and for those who hurt us. We do our best to say with Jesus, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Forgiveness buries the hatchet, allows for starting over, which is indeed new life, a resurrection of life.

Back to those two who invited Jesus to supper at Emmaus... When did they finally recognize him??? When he gave thanks for bread and then broke it and gave it to them. The act of sharing bread in gratitude and kindness was a sign of the Risen Lord being with them as a loving Presence. I know that an important part of our Easters is sharing an Easter feast with family and friends. We often say "Where are you *having* Easter this year?" I am not one to think

saying a blessing is obligatory at every meal; but even silently, we can think of Jesus as a Presence, every time that bread is broken. (Here is an easy “Grace” to remember: “Come Lord Jesus be our guest, as with food and friends we are blessed!”)

I will close with this blessing and challenge. We may not see or touch the risen Lord, but we have the opportunity to see him in the faces of everyone we meet, for all are made in the image of God, having unique strengths and weaknesses. We have the opportunity to bury any hatchet with friends and family, to resolve conflicts with honesty, telling the truth with love. We have the opportunity to let the spirit of Christ in... The risen Christ, in the book of Revelation says “I stand at the door and knock.” By inviting Jesus’ spirit to our table, as did those two disciples, we are inviting Perfect Love, a spirit of forgiving, understanding love, to help our own imperfect love. We can put aside senseless fighting and escalating arguments of right and wrong. We can find a 3rd way, a middle way, a way of compromise, a way of grace and peaceful discussions.

While divine grace, love, or “*Presence*” usually come to us as sheer gift, we can also “put ourselves in a position” to experience them, as one wise teacher said. Another teacher has said we have the “gift” of faith, but also need the “grasp” of faith. There is some attentiveness, some alertness, some action on our part (like forgiveness and starting over) that helps us to experience a Divine Presence, a heartwarming presence. This next song is also by Ken Medema, sung by a “pick up” choir... Feel the spark, the Presence, as we sing “Enter the Joy,” which comes to us as we receive God’s *transforming and loving Presence*. Amen.