

20150420ThirdOfEaster

Instead of looking at what each Sunday brings with regard to lessons, sometimes it is worthwhile to stand back and see the general sweep of the lessons across a liturgical season. I suppose it is easier to do this in the Easter Season because it is only seven Sundays long – unlike Sundays after Pentecost which seem to be endless! Stretching from June to October

I notice for example that the Gospel readings on the first second and third Sundays of Easter in all three years of our three year cycle present the resurrection appearances of Jesus. The trouble is we often then tend to get the stories confused because of what appears to be repetitions. Today's Gospel is a recounting the stories of Jesus' appearances to the disciples. It bears a striking resemblance to the gospel narrative proclaimed last week from John's gospel when Jesus appeared to them in the upper room. Today it is Luke's story of the disciples in the same upper room and Jesus appearing suddenly among them. In each text Jesus appears to the disciples; they are afraid and unbelieving, he convinces them that he is, indeed their teacher and friend who has been raised from the dead.

Yes, there are significant differences between the two, but for the average listener in the pew, it may sound as though we are repeating ourselves. Biblical scholars believe that one reason for the similarity between Luke and John's accounts is that both reach back to an earlier traditional account of what happened.

One of the differences is that before Luke describes the meeting of Jesus and the disciples on the evening of that first day, he is the only one who tells the story of an encounter between Jesus and two dispirited disciples on the road to Emmaus. I love that story but it only appears once in our three-year cycle of Sunday readings. I'm sure you all remember the story - Cleopas and an unnamed companion left Jerusalem and were returning to Emmaus. This story is not read this year during Year B, but there are certain intentionally parallels between the Emmaus narrative and the Gospel we read this morning. The two stories have some key similarities that link these two important resurrection accounts.

Can I remind you of the Emmaus story? Two people from Emmaus, were returning home, continuing to believe that the women's report that Jesus had risen was idle gossip. They **encounter** a stranger on the road and tell him what has happened in Jerusalem. They report the news of what happened to Jesus and how the tomb was supposedly empty. But, as this stranger observes, they are foolish and "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!" Jesus then tries to **explain** to them connecting the dots between what happened and is happening to him and what the scriptures had told. They invite this stranger to **eat** with them and it is in the breaking of the bread that they are **enlightened**; their eyes opened, hearts burn, and they realize that they have been speaking with their risen teacher. Instantly Jesus **exits**. Encounter, Explain, Eat, Enlightened, Exit – 5 "E"

Today's Gospel story follow the same pattern:

Encounter -- failure to recognize

Explanation -- interpreting the resurrection through the lens of the scriptures

Eating -- Jesus breaks bread the one story or eats fish

Enlightenment -- the disciples' eyes are opened, hearts burn, and recognize

Exit -- Jesus departs

Five "E" easily remembered of how the Resurrected Lord is met

The two disciples in Emmaus hurriedly return to Jerusalem in the first story and remember, this is a distance of 30km. They excitedly tell their companions what happened to them. It is at this moment that today's text begins and the pattern repeats itself. The gathering of disciples **encounter** Jesus but again they do not understand what is happening. They appear to connect this figure with their crucified teacher, but they think that he is a ghost. They are filled with confusion and doubt. Jesus then seeks to **explain** what is happening by offering them his body to touch, showing them the wounds of the cross. Next, as he did at the table in Emmaus, he **eats** this time a piece of fish. After all, ghosts do not eat, do they? He **continues his explanation** by opening to them the scriptures to show that everything they have learned and taught before his crucifixion led them to this very moment.

Interestingly, Luke does not tell us if all of the disciples finally **believed**. Did their hearts burn within them as well? But there is one significant addition to this story. Although Jesus did not send Cleopas and his companion out as witnesses, that was exactly what their encounter caused them to do – to witness to the disciples back in Jerusalem. But in this second, parallel narrative, Jesus directly tells the disciples that they are to be witnesses.

Here is another significant difference with John's account of Jesus appearing in the upper room to the disciples minus Thomas and later with Thomas present. Here there is no infusion of the Spirit. Luke makes a significant separation between what happened in that room at the end of the "first day of the week" and what was to happen in an upper room fifty days later on the Feast of Pentecost. The Spirit will come, but for now the disciples are given the content of their message. They are to tell of repentance and forgiveness that will come in Jesus' name. Finally, as he did in Emmaus, Jesus does **make his exit**.

Today's reading ends with the commissioning of the disciples. One will be able to make the connection with today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles. There Luke begins to paint the picture of what it looked like when the disciples fulfilled their calling as witnesses. We read Peter's proclamation of what God had and is doing in Jesus Christ.

Do you know that it is here where we enter the story? We come with our doubts, confusions, fears and misunderstandings. We, each week, through worship we **encounter** the risen Christ.

In the reading of the scriptures and the preached word we are offered **explanation**, proclaiming the good news of what God has and is doing.

We may **eat** with Christ, breaking the bread of the resurrection in the Eucharist. During the distribution of the Blessed Sacrament this morning, the choir will sing the beautiful little anthem by my favourite composer Ralph Vaughan Williams entitled, *O Taste and See*. Originally written for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II during the time that she received communion: *O taste and see how gracious the Lord is, blesseth is the man that trusteth in him*. Did those disciples trust in him? Do we?

The Spirit then brings **enlightenment**, opening our hearts and minds, setting **our** hearts on fire.

Finally, the **exit** should also be ours for Christ has sent us out into the entire world to be witnesses to this amazing news.