

**St. Andrew's Episcopal Church**  
**Third Sunday of Easter Year A**  
**The Reverend Barbara A. Hutchinson**

Mother Betsy and I went to a day long conference at The General Theological Seminary this past Thursday which was designed to gather a group of people to share our "best practices" on scripture study in our parishes and to listen to a keynote speaker who shared with us different techniques for using our imagination to break open the scripture text so we can in a more expansive way notice the truth of God revealed through the biblical narrative. We experimented with engaging in a conversation between the text and a metaphor. For instance, in the story of the stoning of Stephen, which will be our text in a few weeks, we were asked, how is Stephen like the color red? Some answers were his language was fiery, his heart was full of the Holy Spirit, he lashed out like a flame to the opponents of the early Jesus movement, or his caustic words were like a red flag with which one would taunt a raging bull. There were a few other techniques we learned which I'll share with you later, but I wanted to walk through our gospel story with you, using the imagery of color, and invite you to "preach" the sermon with me, to focus on those times which drew your attention, or when your heart hovered over the words with a slight pause. I am going to ask you to imagine the colors of the text at several key points in the narrative. At each of these key points, I'll offer a bit of commentary or reflection which may help you engage with the text in a whole different way. So rather than hearing what spoke to me, I invite you to hear what speaks to you in this story. What I'm going to ask you to pay attention to is when do the colors shift for you in the story? When does the light begin to shine for you, for that will most likely be the place of truth God intends for you to grab onto this morning? Let's listen together for the voice of God. To rest into the text, to allow the colors to appear, if you find you want to close your eyes, to aid your imagination in being set free, please do so.

Our scene begins just hours after daybreak, when Mary runs to reveal to the other disciples, Jesus' tomb is empty. It's what we now call Easter morning, but to some, Easter has not arrived yet in their hearts nor understanding. It's probably about high noon, and although the sun should be shining brightly at that time of day, darkness abounds. Darkness in the follower's hearts. Darkness in the sky above. I see heavy clouds on the horizon as the travelers begin to walk more briskly, hopeful to return home before the clouds open up with a downpour. There's a man and a woman walking ahead, probably husband and wife, since the second person goes unnamed in this story, which most likely meant, it was woman. Now in my imagination, I see children also, but not running ahead, but rather dragging their feet, knowing they should keep up with their parents, but sensing for some reason, they don't want to get to their home, not quite yet. Everyone's shoulders are heavy, there's a cloud of gloom over their heads, sort of like the cloud which follows Eeyore everywhere, but this was one was much darker. Shades of gray and black abound. Their minds are numb with disbelief. There's nothing cheerful, there's nothing light, there's only despair and darkness. My painting of this scene is very bleak. They are returning home after this very disappointing Passover festival, carrying the weight

of their lost hopes and dreams on their shoulders, wondering why they were so foolish to even dream that the Messiah had actually arrived. Another false prophet they may have thought, as they put one foot in front of the other, dragging with them the weightiness of being wrong. They were returning home to their merciful routines, expecting the normalcy of life to drag them out of their despair. The colors I see are layer upon layer of deepening gray, blotches of black, and not a pinprick of light.

Or is there? Can one, did you imagine the children dragging their feet, not wanting to hurry home, the first indication that somehow they knew Christ was going to show up somewhere on this walk? For children often know before adults when Christ is present, don't you think?

Some of us may be on our road to Emmaus, walking in that darkness, waiting for the light to shine. Our horizon may be very bleak at the moment. And yet, our story reminds us that even in, or especially in, those gray and black places of our lives, Jesus walks besides us.

And in our story, Jesus does show up, albeit in an unrecognizable form to his followers on the road. He's a stranger, the only one around who seems not to know what transpired in Jerusalem three days ago. What color would you paint this scene? A lighter gray? Or the same gray with a flicker of light shining, like a flashlight beam, or the first star of the evening, when you just get a glimpse of it's shape in the early night sky. Is there light yet in this scene for you?

So Jesus asks the question, "What are they talking about?" and is fairly abrupt in his response to their answer, which immediately grabs their attention, and engages them in conversation. Now my imagination, since it involves children in the scene, I see those children, gradually yet intentionally, leaving the sides of their parents and being drawn to being nearer to this unfamiliar, yet familiar person. Could it be that your colors in this scene have shifted? Could it be that there is a brightness that is beginning to shine around this mystery man? Is this the piece of the scripture that speaks to you? The engagement with something that is a bit of a mystery?

Do you see a flash of lightning in this scene? Do you see electrical sparks between this stranger and this family? I wonder, Is that what it is like for you when you experience Christ. Is the scene it bright and intensely beautiful? Or is it better represented by a small warm glow that radiates within you?

It is when Jesus goes on ahead and there's this pregnant pause in the text about what will the family do, this is the part that shimmered for me. For I wondered and quite frankly worried, would I have done the same in inviting Jesus to stay for a meal? Would I have expended some of my very limited energy, which had been sapped by my grief, to engage this person who was asking these ridiculous questions? Would I have then invited this man to come and share a meal? Or would I

have allowed him to go on ahead by himself? Grateful once more for the silence and the time to privately process what has happened to my Lord? I truly don't know the answer to that question. There's a part of me that knows myself well enough to think in my times of sadness and despair, I would be more likely to want to go home alone, find my comfortable place to sit, and be still with my sadness. This family was at a crossroads. They had to decide. Of course in their tradition, hospitality was highly valued and completely expected. They would have remembered the story of Abraham and Sarah entertaining angels, who arrived at their tent in the desert.

How would you paint this scene? Is this where the light begins to shine for you? When a faithful couple, put aside their own state of being, and remembered their tradition, remembered what their ancestors had taught them, and invited him to stay. Does your painting of this scene here have broad strokes of gray and black being pushed aside by an ever-expanding ball of light? Or is your painting one like you did as a child, when you colored a bright design, then crayoned black over it all, and then took a pen or pencil and scratched the surface so the bright colors began to emerge? It does seem this passage tells us that path to find the risen Lord is through showing the stranger hospitality. It brings my heart great joy that tomorrow evening we will be doing exactly this, as we offer our warmth and hospitality to our hungry neighbors. It is my prayer that Christ will be illumined to us through our guests and to them through us.

Or is this part of the story still dark to you? Maybe the cloud is heavy for you and there is not yet brightness to be found. You may still be waiting for Christ to show up? I find it interesting, don't you, in this scene, that Jesus was prepared to walk on ahead. That says to me Jesus doesn't compel us to believe, insist that we see the presence of Christ in all ways and times, but invites us to call out to see him. Perhaps that's a good model for us, to be proactive in our searching, to not be passive in our expectations, that Jesus will do all the work. Perhaps this story is a call for us to actively searching each day for our risen Lord. It could also be a call for us as Christians to witness to the presence of Christ in our lives, but not insisting that everyone sees Christ as we do, nor insisting we all share the same dogma, but merely sharing our experience of Christ as our truth, and allowing others to share their truth with us. There's a lot packed into this one story, isn't there?

So the next big scene is the family's moment of recognition, through the breaking of bread, that Jesus was among them. I hope for you this is a dazzling bright scene. The risen Lord has shown up and had been among them, just as is true each time we break bread together. I imagine this scene of gold and white and bright colors to represent joy, maybe an orchid color, with a salmon pink and a deep turquoise as the Caribbean Sea. An explosion of all that is true, as the source of all beauty, and joy, and hope, has been revealed. Is this the scene that shimmered for you? Is this where you most connected with the text? Is this where the light exploded?

Or was it for you, after the recognition, when the family leaped up from their table, running in moonlight, all the way back to Jerusalem to witness to the existence of

their risen Lord? Is that the glory moment for you? Is this the moment when the you hear the echo of the words from Canticle 11 in Morning Prayer, the Third Song of Isaiah, which says, "The sun will no more be your light by day; by night you will not need the brightness of the moon. The Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory? Is it in your response to the presence of Christ when the light shines most brightly for you? This response of the family models to us a way of taking what we share at the Eucharist table outside to the people who are just as hungry as we are for the good news.

For many see their Christian journey as this round trip from Jerusalem to and from Emmaus. As an acknowledgement that at times, we walk in darkness, we wait in despair, and then Jesus comes up alongside us. Yes, to comfort us. Yes to inspire us. Yes to give us strength and courage, but always so that we may tell others the good news. May this be for us – may our Christian journey be focused on a round trip experience– one always moving toward recognition, and then one always returning through a response of sharing or living the good news. One where we are pulled from our place of refuge into a place of action. One where we are invited from an individual response to Christ, to one rooted in community.

Wherever the light shone most brightly for you – wherever your painting shifted from grays and black to brighter colors, I believe our readings today insist we continue to reflect on what happens on a Sunday morning, when Jesus is present to us in the word and sacrament, and allow it to make a difference in the way we relate to each other and those beyond the walls of our church. This is Easter's claim on our actions. We must act as though it makes a difference to us that Jesus is risen and known to us in the breaking of bread.

For when we turn and witness, when we run with excitement to the other followers, or others who are not yet followers, or who may never be followers, and we understand the deep truth of Jesus in our lives, the ripple effect begins. Others' lives are changed. The truth resides more deeply within us. The flame of the Spirit grows within us. And the kingdom comes into being.

Our gospel story today tells us many things: Jesus is our companion, in our sadness and despair. Jesus is walking along side of us, now and always. Jesus doesn't impose himself on us, but waits for our invitation. And when we find Jesus, our only natural response is to leap up from the table and run to tell others. Our role is to make Jesus' resurrection visible to others. For it is then when our pilgrimage of faith has begun and we can almost hear the chorus of angels shout with joy, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia. Amen.