

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Few of us experience lightning bolt faith conversions.

What I mean is, even when we say we fall in love at first sight, it is usually a process, even if we are unaware of it.

And when it comes to trusting in God, even St. Paul needed a three-day intervention.

For most of us, faith is a process

– a relationship that has its highs and lows,

and can even be on-again-off-again like a love affair.

We can have our mountaintop experiences, like Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration;

or a visit to the Holy Land;

or worship in an arena with 30,000 people as at the Youth Gathering.

And we have our quieter, more intimate experiences of the nearness of God

– in prayer,

in the details of creation,

in the touch of a loved one.

There are times when we are angry with God about something – a healing that did not happen, a desire that was not fulfilled, a relationship that fell apart.

And there are times when we know God is not pleased with us

– when we know we have sinned,  
fallen short of what we know God wants of us,  
committed an injustice or wrongdoing against another.

**Our relationship of faith – even for the most spiritual and devoted of us – is unsteady, uneven, wavering.**

As the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic persist and we are beginning to realize that there is no going back to what we knew as “normal” life,

We are anxious about the unknown and uncertain future.

Our confidence in God is strained.

In our lowest moments, we may even wonder if we were foolish to believe in God at all.

**The disciples walking the road to Emmaus that Sunday afternoon were at just such a low point.**

Jesus had died. He was the Messiah! How could he die?

He was their friend – how could he abandon them?!

He was their hope for the future – the one they had counted on to put everything right.

How could he be gone?

How could they have been so wrong about him. So gullible as to trust in him.

**It is good news for them – and good news for us – that God’s loving and saving relationship with us is steady, unwavering, resolute.**

God's love for us is as a high rock around which the roaring river rages.  
We can climb up on it and be safe.

God's love for us is as a fortress high on a hill that no enemy can  
penetrate. We are kept safe within its walls.

**God's love for us is so steady, not even the strongest wind can blow  
it over or the deadliest pestilence make it die.**

Even death itself cannot hold it down –as these traveling disciples are  
about to discover.

But they don't have their conversion experience all at once.

Jesus does not appear to them on the way like a superhero, landing in  
front of them with a flourish of a cape and a drumroll "Ta da!"

No, he doesn't even appear to them as a person they recognized.

He appeared as a stranger – a fellow pilgrim, but someone they did not  
recognize as someone they should know.

**Jesus appeared to them as he appears to most of us – as another  
ordinary person.**

Unexpectedly – in the course of our everyday lives – quietly – as  
someone who is with us on the way of our life's journey.

And Jesus shows interest in us – what are we talking about? What are  
we watching? What are we doing?

Like a friend who is concerned about us and interested in who we are  
and how we are.

**And then Jesus listens.** He listens to these disciples in their confusion  
and grief and perplexity.

*We are talking about "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a  
prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and*

*how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."*

And then – perhaps not as patiently as we might expect – Jesus starts to reveal himself.

Not all at once, not ducking into a phone booth to change clothes, not pulling off a mask to shock them.

But slowly – starting with what they already know – the Word of God in the Scriptures – and like layers of an onion, peeling off little by little the ways in which what God had spoken had taken place in Jesus.

We know some of these words –

- the virgin bears a son,
- the Son of man suffers and dies,
- the day of the Lord will defeat death,
- the servant of God will be pierced,
- the messiah will redeem God's people,
- the Good shepherd will feed his flock.
- The deaf will hear, the blind will see, and the poor will have good news preached to them.

But grief has a way of both closing off our ability to see new things and making us vulnerable to any hope.

So, the disciples listened to this man teaching them the scriptures but did not fully grasp the connections.

But they were engaged enough to invite this man into the inn to have supper with them.

He had piqued their interest enough for them to want more.

And it was at that table -- when with the same gestures and the same words as Jesus -- he prayed and broke the bread,

that they finally realized who it was who had shared their journey.

### **It was Jesus. Risen from the dead.**

People of God, in this time when we are not physically gathered at the table breaking bread with our Lord, we take comfort in knowing that he has been with us on the road all along, and continues to walk with us.

He continues to open the Scriptures to us, warming our hearts to his presence, even when we do not fully understand it.

Jesus is present as we talk with one another about the grief we feel in this time of social distancing; about the uncertainty and anxiety for loved ones; and about hopes and dreams that have been dashed.

He is listening to our conversations and hearing our prayers.

And he is speaking to us through his Word in the Bible and in the worship and prayers we participate in.

We may not recognize him at first; we may not understand; we may waver in our confidence and doubt our faith.

But Jesus does not waver. He is patient. And he will never leave us nor forsake us.

When he died, he died once – and for all – and when he rose from the dead, he defeated death once and for all.

Death no longer has dominion over him.

He is alive – and he is with you, and me, and us who are in this together.

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