

## ***“Remembering a Different Story”***

Rev. David Gregory

April 26, 2020

Easter 3



### **First reading**

Luke 24:13-21

from *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson

That same day two of them were walking to the village of Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was.

He asked, “What’s this you’re discussing so intently as you walk along?” They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend. Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said, “Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard what’s happened during the last few days?”

He said, “What has happened?”

They said, “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word, blessed by both God and all the people. Then our high priests and leaders betrayed him, got him sentenced to death, and crucified him. And we had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about the deliver Israel.” And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us.

Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn’t find his body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn’t see Jesus.”

### **Second reading**

From a blog post entitled *Prepare for the Ultimate Gaslighting*

by Julio Vincent Gambuto

What happened is inexplicably incredible. It’s the greatest gift ever unwrapped. Not the deaths, not the virus, but The Great Pause. It is, in a word, profound. Please don’t recoil from the bright light beaming through the window. I know it hurts your eyes. It hurts mine, too. But the curtain is wide open. What the crisis has given us is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see ourselves and our country in the plainest of views. At no other time, ever in our lives, have we gotten the opportunity to see what would happen if the world simply stopped. Here it is. We’re in it.

We all know that the course of human history can change on a dime. Just ask those who sat by their radios hearing news of the attack on Pearl Harbor, or the people who lined the streets in Dallas to watch a presidential motorcade in 1963, or those in lower Manhattan going about their usual morning routines on September 11, 2001. In the twinkling of an eye, life as we know it can morph into something unrecognizable. In an instant, our experiences, our priorities, and our paradigms can shift so radically that we have no choice but to accommodate them. Rarely, however, has this kind of seismic shift happened on such a global level. The world as we know it bears little resemblance to our expectations. We were sure that things were moving in a certain direction, until they weren't. And suddenly we are dealing with an entirely new set of assumptions.

This was certainly the experience of two of Jesus's disciples walking along a road one day. They thought they were part of a revolution—one that Jesus had referred to as the "kingdom of God"—in which a messianic figure with power and wealth and armies (someone like King David) would come along and liberate the Jews from the heavy hand of Rome. This is one reason that Jesus of Nazareth was often referred to as the "Son of David." That title reflected what everyone was expecting: a hero riding in on a white horse, or at least a donkey, conquering all enemies on their behalf. Deliverance from empire would require the forceful presence of a different empire. This was the only way they could picture a revolution happening, one that would look like all the other revolutions before it.

But then, the crucifixion happened. And the crowds scattered. The followers of Jesus all went into hiding. The revolution was over before it started. And these two, who were sad, lonely, and dejected, were making their way along the path when a visitor joined them and started asking questions. To this person, they said something like, "Where have you been?"

*How could anyone not know about the events of the past few days? We thought he was the One. We thought he was going to make it all happen, but the bad guys won this time, like they always do. We've heard confusing stories about an empty tomb, but that's impossible, isn't it? We thought we knew the world that was coming into view, and now it's completely different, and we don't know what to do.*

How ironic that the very stranger to whom they are entrusting their story is none other than Jesus himself, but they cannot recognize him. They cannot see a risen Jesus because their imagination isn't large enough to let him in. So my question for us today is, "How large is our imagination?" Can we see a new world coming into view, or does it still seem impossible?

For decades now, the Evangelical movement in this country has been seeking its own revolution by giving the church in marriage to a political party. Any number of messianic figures have come and gone, and many are still preaching the gospel of empire. Some leaders have even found something messianic in the current administration, and they've been creating a revolution in the form of lifetime judicial appointments, so that if their ideas cannot be advanced through legislation, they can still get them through the courts. Think about a couple of disciples walking along the road saying, "We thought we were on the road to full employment. We thought that the growth of the stock market had no limit. We thought we could find a way to advance our moral viewpoint, to relax all our environmental standards and turn our nation away from globalism . . . ." A decade ago another set of disciples might have said, "We thought we would see more women in places of power. We thought that global climate accords would continue to grow. We thought that the move to legalize same gender marriage would lead to a

new diverse and multicultural viewpoint among more and more people. We thought we were moving toward an era when healthcare would become a human right instead of a privilege.” So, what happens when things don’t turn out as we thought? What if it turns out we are living in a different world from the one we expected?

We are living in a time that contemporary writer Julio Vincent Gambuto has labeled the Great Pause. With a global pandemic, history has taken such a strange turn that we are barely able to comprehend it, let alone integrate it into the larger discourse of our lives. And when unexpected changes like these occur, we have no choice but to change our focus and open our eyes to the prospect of our greater dreams, to begin to see things that are before our very eyes, things that we usually miss because we have not stopped and lingered there. Oh, there is a revolution happening in our present moment, and it is not the one expected by anyone, regardless of political or religious persuasion. Gambuto says it this way:

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What is this once-in-a-lifetime chance that we have? What is this greatest gift that we find ourselves unwrapping? Where will it lead us, and how will we know it when we see it?

The story of these two disciples goes on when the stranger begins to explain and interpret their experiences in light of a much larger picture. And when he tries to walk away, they compel him to join them for dinner. At this dinner he blesses the bread, breaks it, and gives it to them, and in an instant they recognize this stranger for who he really is. This is when he vanishes from their sight and they are left so stunned by the experience that they start telling a much different story from the one they were telling earlier in the day.

There’s no more talk of revolution, no reference to swinging the pendulum in another direction. It is no longer a question of one empire winning over the other one. No more sadness, dejection, or loneliness. Quite the contrary. They rush to where their community is gathered, and breathlessly relate their story, one that has been told incessantly ever since. And it isn’t a story of revolution; it’s one of resurrection. It’s not a rehashing of some old political clash; it’s about the power of love winning over even the most polarized of empires. The story of Jesus would spread throughout the world; it would alter history for generations to come. And it could be reduced to this one thing, love.

Love your Source-Creator; love your neighbor; love yourself. It is nothing more complicated than that. It does not require a denominational institution to make it real. It does not need a theological system to make it work. It does not need a religious building to keep it safe. We’ve been telling the stories over and over year after year, decade upon decade, and now we have an opportunity to tell it differently than we ever have before. Let’s take this gift of the Great Pause. Let’s unwrap it and make it our own, and then breathlessly take it to the rest of humanity. Beloved, let us love one another.