

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter - B

I finished watching a mini-series on Netflix the other day. It was a thriller and I never figured out who-did-it until the end. I was surprised.

After it was over I wanted to go back and watch it again to see where the clues were that I missed, and, sure enough, once you knew how the story ended all sorts of things came to the forefront.

Have you ever done that? It is satisfying in a certain way—to have all the loose ends tied up and everything clarified.

But that's a trap when it comes to the life of the resurrection. And today's Gospel says as much.

The passage that's provided for us today follows the more familiar account of the two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus when Jesus encounters them and they come to realize who it is in the breaking of the bread—that is, Eucharist.

So, it's interesting that, even though those two have just finished telling their story to those gathered in the upper room, and even though Jesus has appeared to Peter at this point, “the eleven and those with them” were still “startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost.”

Apparently, experiences of the life of resurrection are not that easy to assimilate. What ultimately comes through the stories of encounters with the risen Lord is the confusion and slow growth in understanding on the part of the disciples.

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Jesus spends a lot of time in this account trying to help the disciples bridge the gap between the Jesus they knew before the events of his passion and death took place and what they were experiencing on that Sunday evening.

Basically, Jesus is saying “I’m telling you again what I tried to get you to understand so many times before.”

And there are three things that are always included, three keys to understanding his mission and preaching:

- God’s Messiah was not what they expected, but one who suffered and rose from the dead;
- conversion and forgiveness would be preached in his name;
- his disciples had the responsibility to spread that message to the entire world.

Those are things we’ve heard so many times in the course of our lives, that it can be hard to even have them turn up on our radar screen. It’s easy to co-opt the Gospel so that it serves our purposes better:

- When we domesticate it by making the fact of Jesus’ resurrection about him sitting on the throne in heaven waiting for us to show up with a record of what we’ve done in this life.
- When we skip the part about proclaiming the message of salvation and focus instead on “what’s in it for me?” or “what do I need to do to make sure I don’t end up in the fires of hell?”

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- When we think we've got it down, that we have a good understanding of the life of heaven as being like a big reunion with all the people we've loved in this life and don't want to miss forever.
- When we reduce the life of faith to a moral system that lets us know the difference between right and wrong but doesn't call us to grow into greater intimacy with God.

Maybe the fact that the Gospel passages do not tie everything up in a pretty little bow, like they do at the end of a thrilling movie, is important to keep in mind.

Fact is, the life of the resurrection, Jesus' and ours, will always be beyond us, and we will have to practice living in that space of unknowing and leaving things open, rather than succumb to the temptation to make out of it what we want and push the rest into the background.

For the bible readers among us, I suggest taking some time to simply read all the passages that have to do with the appearances of Jesus after he has risen from the dead, and make note of the fact that they do not all fit into one smooth story. Some of the differences in the details cannot be reconciled.

And that can be a blessing because it reminds us that the whole thing is much bigger than what we can get our minds around.

That's a good place to be because it makes us better prepared to accept the action of the Holy Spirit when it falls outside the boundaries of our preconceptions, and

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pushes us to open our hearts to a reality that is beyond what we can even hope for or imagine.