

Easter 3A (4/30/17)
Acts 2:14a, 36-41
Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19
1 Peter 1:17-23
Luke 24:13-35

The resurrection is no guarantee of easy faith. Hopes emerge, then slip away. Trust builds, then disintegrates. Yet, wherever two or three walk together on the Way, Christ is present, however elusively, inviting us to hear the promise yet again. Then, we get a glimpse of him in our hospitality, in simple food shared among hungry friends and strangers, regardless of our worthiness. It may be fleeting, but by his subtle accompaniment, he reawakens our hope and sustains us for the next step.

According to the classic pattern, saints are born through baptism. In the early centuries, converts to Christianity spent three years in dedicated study and preparation before being immersed in baptismal water at the Easter Vigil and emerging new members of the body of Christ, heirs to the promises made in his death and resurrection. Only then were they invited to the sacred meal of the church, the Lord's own Supper. Adoption into the family was a prerequisite for taking part in family dinner, so to speak. The baptism-first approach has survived the ages, and the church still encourages newcomers to be baptized before coming to the table. But, of course, **God reserves the right to burst the boundaries we set.** We shouldn't be surprised when **God shows up unexpectedly and graces us in unpredictable ways.** Nevertheless, we often are.

Have you heard the conversion story of Sara Miles, former Director of Ministry and founder of The Food Pantry at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco? Following her early work as a cook, war journalist, and political activist, Sara eventually settled in San Francisco, gave birth to her daughter, Katie, in 1989, and promptly endured a series of losses: the fracturing of revolutionary movements in which she had taken part, the end of her marriage, and the painful deaths of two close friends and her father. Little did she know at the time, however, that suffering would open her heart to a new possibility.¹

[Excerpts from *Take This Bread*, xi, xiv-xvi]

God did not insist that Sara be baptized before being revealed to her in the breaking of the bread. **The living Christ came to her first in simple table fellowship, in hospitality that did not presume to judge her worthiness to belong, yet urged her to return and, ultimately, to become an instrument of God's generosity, God's will to feed the multitudes with food and hope.**

In this way, Sara's story echoes that of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus in our Gospel from Luke today. Scattered by the devastation of the cross, they take the seven-mile trek to Emmaus, uncertain of what's in store for them now that their Messianic dreams have fallen apart. "...we had hoped

¹ See *Take This Bread*, 54-5, 57.

that he was the one to redeem Israel,” one of them confesses sadly to a stranger who joins them on the road. **The disciples mourn not only the death of their teacher, but also the death of their hopes for the world he had convinced them was possible. Isn’t that the way of grief? *It wasn’t supposed to be this way. We had hoped for something else.***

Consumed by Good Friday,² the disciples are incapable of considering the possibility of Easter. Nevertheless, Easter sneaks in beside them. The risen Christ, his identity still hidden from their eyes, invites them to give voice to their pain, listens attentively, then encourages them to consider once again God’s word of hope. Upon arrival at their destination, they urge him to join them for dinner. And, **he accepts their invitation, but quickly becomes their host.**³ **Blessing and breaking the bread, Jesus is suddenly recognizable to them, then vanishes as quickly as he had arrived.** “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?” the disciples excitedly agree. Their hopes are renewed, liberated from the tomb of their grief.⁴ Shattered dreams to burning hearts; the pain of loss to the joy of communion.⁵

Dear church, **the resurrection in and of itself is no guarantee of easy faith. Hopes emerge, then slip away. Trust builds, then disintegrates. Yet,**

² See Shannon Michael Pater, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol. 2, 418.

³ See Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 849.

⁴ See Pater, 422.

⁵ See David J. Lose, <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/04/easter-3-a-dashed-hopes-and-surprising-grace/>.

wherever two or three walk together on the Way, Christ is present with us, however elusively, as “a voice that can crack religious and political convictions open,” as Sara Miles puts it, inviting us to hear the promise again. And we are “born anew,” to quote our second reading from First Peter, “through the living and enduring word of God.”

Then, Christ is revealed to us in the breaking of the bread. We get a glimpse of him in our hospitality, in simple food shared among hungry friends and strangers – baptized and unbaptized – regardless of our worthiness. It may be fleeting, but by his subtle accompaniment he reawakens our hope and sustains us for the next step.