

“Walking the Way”  
April 30, 2017  
Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 Luke 24:13-35  
First Presbyterian Church of Sandpoint, Idaho  
Pastor Andy Kennaly

On the upcoming Sabbatical, as I talked about last week in the Adult Sunday school class, Celtic spirituality is one of the aspects I’ll be looking at, especially on the first part while visiting Ireland and Scotland and England, although the Celts were also originally in Europe and even influenced St. Francis of Assisi in Italy. “John O’Donohue was an Irish poet, author, priest, and philosopher. He was a native Irish speaker, and as an author is best known for popularizing Celtic spirituality.” (en.wikipedia.org) He died in 2008 at age 52, but his words echo beyond his mortal life.

This morning I’m going to read a poem called, The Interim Time. Interim has to do with a time in between, like an interim pastor serving a church after a pastor leaves and before a new pastor is called. Those interim times, in the life of a church, can be very important because it gives an opportunity for soul searching, to reflect on mission and identity and call. But interim times in life can also be unsettling to have familiarity replaced with the unknown. That’s what this poem recognizes, unknown mixed with hope.

As I read it, I'd invite you to keep in mind that scene we read about in Luke. It's the third day after Jesus was murdered by the violence of the state and manipulation of the religious leaders. The women had a vision at the tomb while the male disciples did not. It's getting late in the day and two disciples who are not named are walking seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They have a conversation and share a meal of hospitality without even recognizing the Risen Christ. They are confused and saddened, and blinded perhaps in their recognition of transformation. Once they do recognize Christ, they leave at once to share the news. This confusing, sorrowful, yet amazing day involves that interim time where God is at work in ways we may not even know. So, let's read The Interim Time keeping the walk to Emmaus in our minds, or not, if your mind needs to allow space for something else...

**the Interim Time** by John O'Donohue

From: To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings, 2008

When near the end of day, life has drained  
Out of light, and it is too soon  
For the mind of night to have darkened things,

No place looks like itself, loss of outline  
Makes everything look strangely in-between,  
Unsure of what has been, or what might come.

In this wan light, even trees seem groundless.  
In a while it will be night, but nothing  
Here seems to believe the relief of darkness.

You are in this time of the interim  
Where everything seems withheld.

The path you took to get here has washed out;  
The way forward is still concealed from you.

“The old is not old enough to have died away;  
The new is still too young to be born.”  
You cannot lay claim to anything;  
In this place of dusk, your eyes are blurred;  
And there is no mirror.

Everyone else has lost sight of your heart  
And you can see nowhere to put your trust;  
You know you have to make your own way through.

As far as you can, hold your confidence.

Do not allow confusion to squander  
This call which is loosening  
Your roots in false ground,  
That you might come free  
From all you have outgrown.

What is being transfigured here in your mind,  
And it is difficult and slow to become new.

The more faithfully you can endure here,  
The more refined your heart will become  
For your arrival in the new dawn.

Some of the details from Luke are worth noting. Like Emmaus being, supposedly, seven miles from Jerusalem. Apparently, there is some controversy over how far it actually was, with some saying twenty miles. It seems that using the number seven is more about the perfect number, that seven is complete. It was just far enough for this story to be complete in quality and intent.

Another detail is that the two disciples are not named. Don't you love this? It could be you and me? It could be anybody who wonders in their hearts what to make of challenges and despair. And these two are honest with their new-found walking companion and they show dismay, confusion, and their expectations. They call Jesus a prophet, and define this as one "mighty in deed and word before God and all the people." Judging by current headlines from around the world, people are still wrapped by the desire to have a strong leader, someone who gets things done. These two disciples also show their frustration and powerless feeling coming from the fact that their religious leaders handed Jesus over to the state so he would be killed. Such

anguish at feeling cheated by those who are supposed to represent you and be advocates rather than perpetrators!

Then comes the clincher that shows us where these two disciples are coming from in this Interim Time. They said by way of conclusion, “But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” “But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” They wanted a political savior to boot out the Romans and restore the nation under God. They wanted Israel to receive all the blessings, and yet their tribal thinking was blinding them to God’s larger, saving presence right before their eyes. Dashed expectations are at the root of their discontent, their grief, and their confusion. Jesus in their midst yet not recognized calls them foolish and slow of heart, that they don’t trust what they were told all along.

Another detail is that hospitality is a normal thing in that culture and it’s expected that they would invite this stranger to stay with them for a meal and the night. This was normal, very ordinary. Yet this stranger takes the ordinary and transforms it in ways that open their eyes. They participate by welcoming the stranger, by showing hospitality, and by honoring this person through a shared meal. Once their eyes open and they recognize the Risen

Christ, that's when "the stranger" vanishes. Or is it, that's when the Risen Christ is now visible through them, in their lives, by their actions, in their mission? They are now included in God's ongoing ministry. The Interim Time has passed and something new, a new creation, has emerged.

Anxiety in our culture is palpable. Institutions that once seemed so rooted and sturdy cannot be assumed anymore. Even the mainline churches are declining and smaller churches, especially, are closing their doors. The climate is warming up and the number of species is going down as we live on the edge of the sixth great extinction of geologic history. In a macro-sense, on a large scale, that Interim Time poem and this walk with the Risen Lord is very relevant. Yet it's also important, and perhaps in even more powerful and effective ways, for our own hearts to undergo a transformation from all that we think we are in terms of identity, to simply being in Christ's living presence in our core essence. What is yet to come depends on this new dawn, a dawning of awakened hearts living with open eyes that recognize divine presence even where others do not.

That final detail as the two unnamed disciples move out with joy to share the news, they are leaving on this hike after supper. Travelling at night

is not advised on dark roads, and even when they find the eleven and their companions, they are gathered together, probably in a locked room, based on those other stories as Jesus appears in the midst of their fear and confusion, breathing Holy Spirit and sharing peace beyond understanding.

They share stories and encourage one another. That's the church at work. That is the focus that comes from a center that's grounded in God. That is humble strength, not being against anything but being for something. That Christ is risen has an affect and disciples are called to celebrate.

As we go into the week ahead, take time to reflect on the details that otherwise get overlooked. Rather than just having experiences, take time to reflect, and discover meaning. And find at least one other person, such as a friend or Spiritual Director or counselor to talk to so you won't be just tossed around by the challenges of Interim Times where things seem out of sorts, but you can claim hope as it is revealed.

As John O'Donohue reminds us, "  
...it is difficult and slow to become new. ...The more faithfully you can endure here,... The more refined your heart will become...For your arrival in the new dawn.

Living the new dawn in Easter Joy, may God glorified now and forever.  
Amen.