

God Knocks Twice
The Reverend Debbie Cook, Grace Church in Haddonfield
Third Sunday of Easter, RCL Lectionary Easter 3A
April 6, 2008

Emmaus poem..by Nancy McDonald*

A strange place to make a new beginning
here
on a dusty road
not leading
much of anywhere
in a time when the ritual seasons
have already turned
and at dusk
almost dark, in fact
what an unsuitable place and time
to begin
And the two of us
plodding along
dull-headed
wet-witted
after three days of regretting
and recounting losses
Our bodies
hobbled and our souls brokered
we moved like confused moths
near an extinguished wick
The fire was gone.
And now we mourned
Was it sorrow
for ourselves or him that we most
valued

The answer?
we may never know
nor does it matter now

We were teachers who planned too closely
parents who engineered the form
We left no room to enjoy the exploration
and the moment of the child
Now in this twilight of being
we were voiceless
Our metaphors and tropes
failed us in this sullen grief
No hope, but God
and to hope in Him
seemed hopeless
missed the opportunity provided
Why would God knock twice

The road to Emmaus stretched ahead of them, and it seemed...long.

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It had been a confusing day, a confusing time. In less than one week's time, all that Cleopas and his friend had hoped for seemed lost; their leader and teacher, gone. Jesus, arrested and interrogated; Jesus, beaten and insulted; Jesus crucified, dead and buried. And then today...there were the women, the ones who heard of Jesus' resurrection from angels. Could their enormous grief have caused them to imagine it all? Even still, it didn't seem like them. But who could believe such a thing? How could it be true? They set out on their journey with heavy hearts. Maybe in Emmaus, away from Jerusalem, they could gain some perspective, and start their lives anew.

Somewhere along the way, a stranger joined them. Where he came from, they did not know. He asked them what they were talking about. They stopped—could it be that this man knew nothing of what had happened in Jerusalem? Where had he been, living under a rock? And so Cleopas and his fellow disciple shared the sad and confusing story, the story of the one that they 'had hoped' would be the one to redeem Israel. Now their hope was gone, the dream in tatters. And yet the women talked of resurrection....they didn't know what to believe anymore.

The stranger told them they needed to open their eyes and hearts to see and understand. The two men may have been startled—after all, wasn't this guy just the clueless wonder a few minutes ago? Obviously they had misjudged him. Having a ways to go, and time to listen, they let this enigmatic stranger join them. And so the lesson began...from Moses on through the prophets, the stranger explained and taught, revealing scripture in new and insightful ways, opening their minds to the ways of God versus the ways of the world. And as their understanding grew, so

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oddly enough, did their sense of hope. Suddenly, the journey which once seemed so long now seemed too short, and before they knew it, they had arrived at their intended destination. They went to stop for the night; the stranger walked ahead, to continue his journey.

The rules of hospitality required that they offer the stranger shelter and food for the evening—and they did so, willingly. The same rules required the stranger to decline the first invitation. But Cleopas and his companion insisted—this stranger had been so gracious to them, shared his knowledge with them, renewed their hope. They wished to know him better, for there was something about him that just seemed so familiar....And so as they sat at table, the guest who became host reached for the bread. As he blessed it, broke it and turned to give it them, the final piece in the puzzle of the day fell into place, and they saw with clear eyes who they had been journeying with—Jesus, alive, resurrected. And in the instant in which their hearts started to leap for joy, Jesus vanished from sight.

Suddenly, it all clicked. The confusion and the sadness and the pain were gone—and so too were the thoughts of lost hope and having to start anew. They had to share this good news with the others, they could not leave them behind in their pain and confusion. They left quickly, retracing the steps that they took not so long ago—was it really only a few hours since they passed this point? Things looked so different now! They hurried on, and found the eleven gathered together, rejoicing, for Simon, too, had seen the Lord. And they shared their story of Jesus, and how they came to know him in the word revealed to them and the breaking of the bread.

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We, too, come to know Jesus through the Word and Table. Each time we gather in worship, we listen to the family stories, known to us as Scripture. Scripture that shows us the salvation history of world, scripture that teaches us, guides us, strengthens us and gives us hope. We read of people much like ourselves, far from perfect and yet through them, God shows forth God's glory, and accomplishes God's purposes. We hear again and again words that speak of God's faithfulness, of God's love and promise, of God's concern for the poor, the suffering, the persecuted. Through the words and life of Jesus, we come to know God even more clearly—learning of God's self-giving love to all, of God's call to reconciliation and forgiveness and freedom from the power of sin and death.

At the table, we come to know Jesus in the bread and the wine, in the Body and the Blood. Just as Bread must be broken in order to be shared, in order to accomplish its purpose to nourish us, so Jesus' body was broken so that we may know new life in Christ. And as the wine is poured out, so was Jesus' blood poured out for the forgiveness of sin. That which we hold out our hands for and take into ourselves when we come to the table becomes part of us—God with us, God in us. In a very real and tangible way, we enter into the life of God, and God enters into us. We, as members of the body of Christ, take into us the Body and Blood of Christ to strengthen and nourish us, renew us and revive us, so that we too may share in Christ's work of reconciliation, of drawing all persons into the arms of our loving God.

And just as Cleopas and his friend found their hearts burning within them and their energy renewed so they could hurry back to Jerusalem to share the good news, so we too are sent out to share as well. As McDonald's poem ends:

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Bones of fire now support us
so full of love that
it hurts our lungs to breathe
These the bodies
which the third one left us
we dare not guess the features
of our souls
This road to nowhere goes
on forever
out from Emmaus into a waiting world
Who is this that we carry now
in witness
What names does He bear
that we can call Him in the night
It is a secret
But this we share with you
o children
When you see Him
you will recognize the face

Look for him in the Word, at the Table, and in the stranger you meet along the way—for God
will knock twice.

Amen

* “Emmaus Poem” by Nancy McDonald, www.smp.org

For complete poem, see pages below:

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[Emmaus Poem](#) (Article 34)
Nancy McDonald

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Why would God knock twice
Then, at this point
a stranger
joined us
Did he make a third
or were we still just two?
We were not sure ourselves
but know for certain
when bread was broken
time was fractured, too
And when we rose and left the table
we were different
ourselves yet more than selves
rose up to leave

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it hurts our lungs to breathe
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which the third one left us
we dare not guess the features
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Taken from website: www.smp.org

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