

“The Emmaus Experience”

Luke 24: 13-35

As we walk with you on this hour of worship, open our eyes and our hearts, O Risen Christ – so that we will recognize and worship you. Amen.

In the advent of the internet millions of places on earth are featured in the worldwide web. I am surprised that even small towns in the Philippines have official websites of their own, if not a resident who may be in other place such as Europe or in the U.S. set up a site to introduce their place. Usually pages in the websites include not only pictures but also a glimpse of their history. People are proud of their heritage; what their great grandparents did during wars, their accomplishments in arts or business. It also includes invitation to visit their place to relive the glory of the past and see their achievements of the present.

All the while, I thought maybe the town or city of Emmaus of today has a website. I am excited to know how they remember their own history. If I am from Emmaus, I will definitely post a picture of the road where Cleopas and his companion walked. I will put a caption in the photo saying; this is the road where Jesus walked and explained what happened during Good Friday and Easter Sunday roughly 2000 years ago.

But Emmaus was only mentioned once in the Bible. In fact, this story is unique to Luke. We cannot read it in the other gospels. Scholars and archeologists suggest that there are four possible sites to locate Emmaus but none of the present towns can relate to the story. So there is no Emmaus of today where people can exploit something for tourism or for business purposes out of the story that we have in Luke.

The significance of the Emmaus experience is not tied up to a particular place, for no one can lay an exclusive claim to the story, Emmaus now can be any road where risen the Christ walks with us. It is no wonder that many spiritual retreat houses and churches are named Emmaus for Emmaus signifies that transforming encounter every time Christ reveals his presence.

In the season of Easter, the stories of victory over death comes not as a given. Last week we have the story of Thomas, as Joel rightly pointed out on his sermon, the label “doubting disciple” was stuck with him. Today, we have Cleopas and another unnamed disciple who were moving out of Jerusalem with pain in their hearts. None of the disciples were rejoicing during the crucifixion because they knew in advance that Jesus will rise again. They were scared to death and in fact were hiding and meeting in closed doors for they were uncertain as to what will happen next.

This was true for Cleopas and to anybody who will walk with him on this

road of disappointment and despair. We could be Cleopas companion in times when darkness surrounds our journey of faith.

One writer (Vince Gerhardy) at one point asked, “Have you ever noticed that some of the saddest words in our language begin with the letter D? – disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, despondency, depression, despair and death. He said; “all of these words sum up how Cleopas and his companion were feeling as they walked up the road toward Emmaus. They had left the downhearted and confused band of disciples who were afraid and bewildered over what had happened to Jesus on Good Friday.”

But the Christian testimony is that it is midst of darkness that God’s light shines so brightly. It is that moment when we surrender and throw the towel that God comes into rescue. The Emmaus experience comes to anyone who walks the road all line up with the letter D experience – disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, despondency, depression, despair and death – what comes next is the Emmaus experience, that moment of truth when realize that God did not abandon us after all, in fact, God walked with us on the road we trod, patiently pointing to us that there is hope, there is light, there is victory, there is life beyond death.

In the story, the risen Christ points to the Scripture, Jesus explained the significance of what happened in the past week. In vs. 25-27 we read:

*Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, **he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.***

One of the pillars of the Protestant, Evangelical and Reformed tradition is our emphasis on the Bible as God’s living Word. We hear God speaks to us through the sacred stories of God’s people interpreted through the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Through the Bible God speaks to us words of encouragement, at times God disturbs our conscience. As we see injustice and oppression – God’s resounding voice echoes through the words of condemnation from the prophets of old. At times God’s word leads us to shame and to tears as we see our discordant selves in contrast to our high calling as disciples of the servant Christ. At times, the Bible upsets us when God challenges our assumptions and our values – when Christ speaks about walking a second mile, loving our enemies, giving everything we have. So in our discomfort we rationalize, we justify ourselves saying, “*let us be practical*” or “*let us not be literal,*” although at times we insist to be literal on verses that support our views and our ideologies. But whatever situation we face, God confronts us through the living words of the Scripture. This is

one of the lessons of the Emmaus experience.

The other half of the lesson has to do with inviting Christ to join in the table, inviting Christ to be with us and in us. This is how Luke tells the story: (vs. 28-31)

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

The Scriptures was explained but that was not enough, just as reading the Bible is not enough for us today. We need to let the word to dwell in us.

In the story, Jesus did not force himself into Cleopas and his companion, so he walked ahead *as if* – I heard kids use the term *as in* – *as in* is use to describe something big or great. However, the words *as if* – is different, *as if* waits for a cue to be invited or to be offered for the second time.

Asians, especially Filipinos do not usually express sentiments directly. So if you ask, are you hungry, the first response would be no or thank you, *as if* one is not. To act *as if* also tests whether the invitation is sincere or not. But when you offer the invitation for the second time that is the cue. There is no *as if* moment anymore.

Cleopas and his friend got it right – and they urged Jesus *strongly* to stay with them. Then something great happened! Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. The recognition happened when they invited the risen Christ to be with them. This is the other part of the Emmaus experience.

What happened at the table? Did Cleopas and his companion saw in the hands that broke, blessed and gave the bread the mark of the nails; that was what Thomas wanted, maybe! Did they remember the Last Supper story through Jesus' action and words? Whatever it was what we know was that their eyes were opened and they recognize him. It was only then that they realized and they said to each other, "*Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?*" The Emmaus story is so rich and so full to exhaust that even today we can experience it again and again.

Going back to the internet, someone (E. Conroy) tried to spell-check the word Emmaus on his computer but the word was not recognized. However, there two suggestions one word as emboss. Those who are in the printing

business know this word – it means to “rise above the surface.” So you can do an emboss printing on paper or on T-shirts and it will protrude from the surface. He said, that is also what Emmaus is all about – “rising above the surface.” It is about walking like any other journey or eating just any other meal but something special arises from that ordinary experience. Emmaus is experiencing God’s extraordinary presence in the ordinary, most often surprisingly!

The other word is ember. Those who love *sinugba* (barbecue) know what ember is all about. Webster defines it as a glowing fragment (as of coal) from a fire; we call it *baga* – it is a fire that is slowly dying but is still capable of being revived. Emmaus is also like the ember. This is the word that best describes “the burning of the hearts of the disciples as Jesus opened the scriptures for them on the road.” It is hard to describe but many of us know this experience, when God’s word and God’s presence warm our hearts and our lives.

Emboss, Ember, Emmaus – these are not words that speak only of the past – we can have these experiences today – if we listen to God in the Scripture and invites Christ to dwell in us.

Sermon, April 6, 2008

3rd Sunday of Easter
April 6, 2008 – 1:30 P.M.

Preacher: Rev. Reuben D. Cedino
Sermon: "*The Emmaus Experience*"

SCRIPTURE READING:
Epistle: 1 Peter 1: 17-23
Gospel: Luke 24:13-35

Anthem: "A Resurrection Proclamation"
Fil-Am UCC Choir

Liturgist: Ms. Leofe Ramos-Sitoy
Pianist: Mr. Noel Rivera III
Organist and Choral Director: Ms. Rachel A. Dadap

Ms. Eva Tubo, *Elder-in-Charge*
Ms. Dinah A. Neri, *Steward-in-Charge*
Ms. Pinky Sevileno, *Trustee-in-Charge*
Ms. Ellen Cedino & Ms. Debbie Villanueva, *Ushers*
Zach & Vanessa Polo-Bates, *Floral Offering*

