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## “Be Amazed”

A sermon by Sam R. Miglarese

Third Sunday of Easter (Year A)

May 4, 2014

Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19; 1 Peter 1:17-23

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This Emmaus story is our story. It is a story about us, like so many in the Scriptures. It is about who we are as a people of faith.

The account, the narrative that we just heard, is a whole history of the followers of Jesus from the beginning to our present day. It includes the story of the spiritual pilgrimage of our life together in faith. Embedded in this story is the perennial Christian strategy of gather the folks together, hear the Word of the Lord, and break the bread at the table of the Lord.

We heard, in the reading from Acts, a similar description of the early Christian church. They devoted themselves to apostolic teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers. **Gather the folks, tell the story, break the bread!**

In this account of the two Emmaus disciples on Easter Sunday afternoon, we have a long and elegant narrative of the appearance of Jesus after his resurrection. There they were disillusioned, sad, walking away from Jerusalem, on their way home, reflecting on their sadness and disillusionment about this Jesus that they placed their hopes in and the movement that surrounded him. They were sad. They had given up. They were abandoning the cause that they felt had been defeated by the crucifixion of Jesus in Jerusalem.

And then a mysterious stranger walked with them and began to ask some basic questions about what they were doing and what they were talking about. They got a little frustrated with him: “Where have you been? Haven’t you heard about all that has happened in Jerusalem about this Jesus in whom we placed so much hope? That he was turned over to the leadership, and they condemned him, and they crucified him?” They used that famous language: “And *we had hoped* that he was the one who was to come and to redeem Israel.” And yet they noted at the same time to Jesus, who was the stranger among them, this sense of, “Well, we heard some astounding news from the women of our company that they went to the tomb, and the body wasn’t there, but nobody saw him. Others went and confirmed that the women were correct, that the body was not in the tomb. But nobody had seen him.”

And then this mysterious stranger goes on to explain and interpret the Scriptures from the beginning of the prophets to himself where he explained that this Messiah needed to suffer before his glory. Then he shared a meal with them, and in that meal that he so often shared with them throughout the course of his ministry, they recognized him, and he disappeared and vanished from their midst.

There are some major themes of Luke that are embedded in this story, the theme of Jesus as a prophet in word and in deed who was called by God to bring the kingdom of peace and justice into the world in which he lived. There is the theme of the Scriptures being the fulfillment of all the Jewish Scriptures that he was the one who was to suffer, the language of the Suffering Servant that we sang with our choir so beautifully on Good Friday night. The Suffering Servant, in a sense, becomes the image of this Jesus, who was to represent the fulfillment of Israel’s Scriptures.

Finally, the theme of Luke that is so powerful: his table fellowship shared meals. It was always at a meal in Luke that so many important revelations and disclosures occurred about the meaning of Messiahship that Jesus represented for us, for his day and for our day. They came to know, in word shared and in meal shared, the presence and the mystery of Christ Jesus among us who has risen from the dead.

We come to know this presence of the risen Lord, not just simply in word and in sacrament, but also because we are a people in Christ who are bread for one another.

Images of life tumble through my mind as I recall the recent past in our own community.

I see the family shattered by sudden death in a tragic car accident. When we think back over the weeks where Bet and Dewey are still experiencing the awesome grief in that family tragedy, I also see in that shattering of their lives the care and the love of this community that embrace and support them.

I see the faces of gratitude on hungry and homeless men and women who come to our door and who are served by our agencies, given new hope for affordable housing, and for the possibility of work that will sustain and support them in their journey of life. All this I see at work the hands of this community, not just in the committees, but in the hands of those who are willing with their tithes and their commitment of care to support those who have been cut off from the basic needs of life.

I see in this community our parents who come to that baptismal font with such great joy in their lives when they bring their children for baptism. There they experience the awesome mystery of new birth that unfolds in our midst. It becomes a very powerful moment for them and for all of us who witness it.

I see relationships renewed as forgiveness is offered for words we wished we could take back, for disappointments and resentments that build up, and for even those bitter wounds of betrayal that slowly heal. The possibility of healing and forgiveness is embedded in the way in which we see the risen Lord among us.

I see the resurrection and the presence of the risen Christ in the way in which our choir leads us in a chorus of praise. They so joyfully share with us songs of joy, not only in special presentations, but in the way which, week after week, they prepare and sing with us the songs of faith that allow us to be inspired and renewed in our commitment to see the risen Lord among us.

I see resurrection in this community in so many ways, and I hope that you do as well.

There is a particular text from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel that I read recently in the *New York Times*. Some months ago, David Brooks wrote a column about the hostility towards orthodox religion, and the Rabbi says this:

“Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement... get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal...” Everything is incredible. Never treat life casually. This is what captured my imagination. Heschel says, “To be spiritual is to be amazed” (David Brooks, “Alone, Yet Not Alone,” *New York Times*, January 28, 2014, p. A21).

I encourage you to be amazed at the ordinary everyday living of your lives and to see with new eyes by the word you have just heard and the breaking of the bread we share the presence of the living Lord, so that we together can affirm, in Christ, that we are bread for one another.