

3 Easter YA 2023

Tag, You're It!  
By the Rev. Salying Wong

It's still Easter day, the very same day that the women found the tomb empty and met the resurrected Jesus. Never in their imagination did they think that Jesus would rise from the dead. They ran to the apostles and told them, "We have seen the Lord!" Granted, this was hard to believe. But it was even harder to believe because women told them. And, according to the Gospel of Luke, women were given to "idle tales".

All were puzzled, including Cleopas and his friend. As they were on the Way from Jerusalem to Emmaus, they considered all this news and wondered what it might mean. One of them said, "Those crazy women and their stories!"

But Cleopas said, "But, I have known Mary and the women all my life. They don't make us stuff. Besides, Simon also saw the Lord."

His friend retorted, "Yeah, but how could this be? It would mean a whole new way of being. If the dead don't remain dead, then the way I see the world would have to utterly change."

At this point, the resurrected Jesus saddled up next to them. But, they didn't recognize him. Perhaps, it was because their minds couldn't break open to the new view. Perhaps, the resurrection is not easily recognizable? Maybe it takes time to listen; it takes time for eyes to open.

Jesus asked them, "Are you going my Way? What's the news?"

Cleopas said, "The news? Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who's not listening on NPR?"

Jesus asked, “Is something happening?”

“We're talking about Jesus of Nazareth! He was a prophet mighty in word and deed! So, we thought he was the messiah to save Israel from Rome. But, he failed. He was crucified! He did not just fail. He utterly failed. Since his crucifixion, we've been reeling with grief and disappointment. In fact, we're leaving Jerusalem today. We thought that when he came to Jerusalem, he would take it over. There was a whole palm procession—we all expected great things. The authorities were watching. Now...can we confide in you? You look trustworthy. We think they might be coming for us. So, we're leaving Jerusalem and all our dreams behind.

“But then this morning, some of the women who followed Jesus went to the tomb. They found it empty. Yes, there are grave robbers out there. But then, they said they saw Jesus alive again. So we went there—and though we found the empty tomb, we didn't see Jesus there. So, we're not sure what to believe. If Jesus is alive, where is he?”

Jesus said, “So, you don't believe the women. But, didn't this Jesus say to you that he would die and rise again? It sounds like you don't believe him, either. Would you believe him now, if he stand right in front of you? It sounds like you're slow to believe.”

Cleopas and his friend said, “Well, you have to admit, all of this is an astonishing proposition.”

Jesus said to them, “Walk with me. We've got seven miles before we come to Emmaus. I'll explain things. First, we'll start with Moses and the Law. Then we'll go through *all* the prophets. I hope that you will find that the summary of the Law and Prophets is about a God of compassion. God's compassion is so deep that he came to suffer with us, to suffer even because of us, to show us the way out of all our confusion and anger and hate. The cross is the very opposite of power and control. Each person must take up their own cross, that is, surrender to the mercy of God, the

only mercy wide enough to save. God's mercy is so great that that which is dead can live again. This is why the messiah had to suffer. So, let's start with Moses..."

And so Jesus opened up the scriptures to them. And a burning began inside them. It was a burn of joy, like fire lighting a cold cave. Something that was tightly wound was loosening within them.

When they reached Emmaus, they offered Jesus hospitality. "Come, Stranger, break bread with us." When they set the food on the table, Jesus said the prayer of blessing over bread, *HaMotzi*, "Blessed are you Lord God of the Universe for you bring forth bread from the earth." And when he broke the bread, Cleopas and his companion recognized the stranger as Jesus. And as soon as they saw him, he disappeared from their sight.

Cleopas and his companion said to one another, "Did you also feel the burning within your heart when he opened up the scriptures? Jesus is risen! First we were going one way, but now we are walking his Way. We have got to go back to Jerusalem right now and tell the eleven." And so they did.

This is such a familiar story. And yet, this year for the first time, I see a pattern in this story that is also familiar to our worship. On the road, on that first Sunday of the resurrection, Jesus led the liturgy of the Word when he talked of Moses and the prophets; at Emmaus, Jesus enacted the liturgy at the Table when he broke bread. We do the same in our eucharistic liturgy. On Sunday, the day of resurrection, we listen to the scriptures in the liturgy of the Word; we break bread at the liturgy of the Table. The liturgy works on us, enlightens us—and if we are paying attention, we recognize the risen Christ in our midst.

The liturgy is also a game. It seems that as soon as Jesus rises from the dead, he wants to play a game with us, and that game is hide and seek. The thing about games is that they have their own integrity, with its own rules, rules that don't usually apply in the "world out there." They also

involve work, but the work is so wonderful, we call it play. That's what liturgy for worship is. Liturgy in Greek means work of the people. I would also say liturgy is the play of God. Again, that play is hide and seek. How many of you have come to church Sunday after Sunday and year after year, and suddenly you recognize something in the scriptures or at communion and it makes your heart warm or sing or dance?

Eastertide is 50 days long, purposely longer than Lent. These fifty days are called the period of Mystagogia. It is an induction into the mysteries of Christ, traditionally for people new to the faith; but, really, we are always new to the faith. It is worth considering that the resurrection places us in mystery rather than certainty. Jesus seems to enjoy this, saddling up to us and asking us questions and letting us dialogue with one another and with him till we see him. Then, as soon as he appears, he disappears. And, he doesn't appear again in the same way. Our hearts burn and yearn and long for him, and yet, he is always with us. The path of mystery is about disrupting our own preconceived notions of how Jesus ought to appear and to open our eyes to how he already appears.

So, friends, welcome to the great hide and seek game of Mystagogia. Come to the liturgy, look in the closet of scripture, underneath the blanket of the eucharist, and experience the joy of discovering Christ. And then, go into your closet and pray, and listen to the knock on the door. And when it is opened, Jesus will touch you and say, "Tag, you're it!"