We Had Hoped… Healing Trauma in Others
Isaiah 53:1-5; Luke 24: 13-35

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called
Emmaus, about seven miles[a] from Jerusalem. **14** They were
talking with each other about everything that had
happened. **15** As they talked and discussed these things with each
other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; **16** but
they were kept from recognizing him.
17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you
walk along?"
They stood still, their faces downcast. **18** One of them, named
Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem
who does not know the things that have happened there in these
days?"
19 "What things?" he asked.
"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a
prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the
people. **20** The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be
sentenced to death, and they crucified him; **21** but we had hoped
that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is
more, it is the third day since all this took place. **22** In addition,
some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this
morning **23** but didn't find his body. They came and told us that
they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. **24** Then
some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as
the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."
25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to
believe all that the prophets have spoken! **26** Did not the Messiah
have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" **27** And
beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them
what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

28 As they approached the village to which they were going,
Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. **29** But they urged
him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is
almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.
30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave
thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. **31** Then their eyes
were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from
their sight. **32** They asked each other, “Were not our hearts
burning within us while he talked with us on the road and
opened the Scriptures to us?”
33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they
found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together **34** and
saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to
Simon.” **35** Then the two told what had happened on the way, and
how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Death is such a strange thing because it activates the reptilian part of our brain. This is the self-preserving part of the brain that responds to perceived threats microseconds before our rational capacity kicks in. So we find ourselves doing odd habitual things in response to a threat that may not seem to make rational sense, but we

do them anyway, before we are conscious of what we are doing.

I knew a couple that had a son, their oldest child, who died when he was about 24. He hadn't graduated from college yet, still finding himself. He had hitchhiked across the country a couple of times on grand adventures, meeting the most interesting collection of odd characters along the way.

The last time he returned home, he had made an acquaintance with a troubled young man. Their son was a compassionate guy like that who made room for people.

But this troubled young man that he befriended started stalking him. It got stranger and stranger, until one day, the troubled young man showed up at their son's

door, agitated and disappointed. He started yelling. Out of the blue, he pulled out a gun and shot their son and killed him.

His parents were devastated. Outraged. They wanted to know what happened. From the beginning, the troubled young man claimed that it was an accident from a drug deal gone bad, which was not true. Their son had never dealt drugs of any kind.

The police found a very small amount of marijuana in their son's apartment, which was the extent of the evidence for a drug deal. But when the case was heard, the narrative prevailed that drugs were involved, so the troubled young man was given a minimal sentence with maximum probation.

The parents were outraged, their child taken from them for extending an act of kindness to a troubled young man, their son's reputation defamed by the very troubled young man that their son had tried to help. In the months after his death, his parents kept their dead son’s apartment just as it had been, like an active crime scene that still might yield fresh evidence.

Over and over, they would retell the story of what happened, the injustice of it all, the misunderstanding, the insult to their son in the trial. Family and very close friends would patiently listen. Over and over this went, week after week after week.

And that is what we do: we tell these stories that don’t make sense over and over to each other, hoping that

somehow, someway in telling it one more time, something will happen that will make the senseless make sense… only it never does.

Our disciples in this morning's story are doing that. They are leaving Jerusalem after an unjust and morally senseless crucifixion killed their friend and leader. They are so involved telling each other the same story that when the risen Christ comes close to them, they don't exactly realize who it is. They are so self-absorbed in the telling of the story, trying to make sense of the senseless. That is what we do. And we get myopic like that.

And Jesus finally asks them what they are talking about. They immediately tell their story one more time. "Are you the only one in all of Jerusalem that hasn't

heard?” And they recount the details, the senseless details, the details that they can’t get to add up.

It goes on like this, most of the time for months on end, like we are caught in the same loop. We aren’t seeking a rational explanation. We are seeking an emotional explanation, a soul explanation. We never say this out loud, but we need an explanation that can tell us what we are supposed to do with our broken heart because someone we loved deeply is dead, and we are so, so sad that it is killing us.

Sometimes we subconsciously keep telling the same stories because they can help discharge some negative emotions. We can vent, like my couple. They had this troubled kid to place their anger on. They had a failed

justice system to place their anger on. I think their friends thought that it was good for them to vent some of that anger, so they let them tell the same stories because they knew that it was a good way to blow off some steam. It is what we do for each other.

But a year and a half goes by, and they still have their son's apartment. They still haven't touched anything in the apartment. It still looks like a crime scene waiting for someone to find the clue that will unlock the puzzle. One day, our couple's sister visits them and asks to see the apartment. The couple go through the same process again, and they tell the same story again.

Their sister is listening to a speech that she has heard many, many times now, over months and months. Only

this time, at the apartment, she picks up a photograph of her nephew, their son. Their son was on top of a mountain out West, after a long day's hike, smiling with a couple of other hikers, people that he had met on that trip.

In our bible story, we are told that Jesus listened to the disciples talking about the injustice and disappointment that the disciples had, their hurt. The disciples say to Jesus, whom they do not recognize yet, “We had hoped he was the one.” Yes, we hoped he was the one. We hoped, and now we have this spiritual crater of disappointment.

And the resurrected Christ interrupts them with a different perspective. He takes the same set of facts, broadens the perspective, and offers a different insight

into the situation. He acknowledges the injustice, the suffering, the tragedy of what they have been through, but he offers a redemptive reinterpretation for them. He interprets the scriptures for them and explains that these meaningless events actually have a substantive meaning.

We are told that their ‘hearts burned within them’. They become alive with the life-giving, quickening power of faith. It breaks them out of this protective merry-go-round of a story that they are still telling themselves that isn’t working so well anymore. Somehow, that story is not enough, and spiritually, they are receptive to being taken to a new place. We become open to faith.

It is the way spiritual healing takes place in our lives. God meets us where we are to offer us what we need to

heal. We can't go back to the way things were before we went through this trauma. And for a long time, we aren't ready to move towards anything else. Spiritually, we are afraid. Subconsciously, we are afraid. We are riding this merry-go-round rather than moving forward.

But there comes a day when we need to heal. And God comes to walk beside us. Lots of times, we don't even exactly recognize that God is with us, that the power of the resurrection is drawing near to us, like a good friend that is right beside us, patiently meeting us where we are.

Our couple's sister picked up the photograph, asked a couple of questions about where it was taken out West, and who the other hikers were. Then she said, "You know

my nephew was always inviting other people to join him in discovering the wonder and beauty of nature. He hiked some of the greatest places out West in our beautiful country, with friends and strangers alike. I wonder what he would like to see extended, what it was that he stood for in the way that he lived?"

What a great question. I wonder what **he** would like to see his legacy be?

We get so involved in protecting ourselves from these really deep pains. They can be overwhelming, devastating. It takes us a while, emotionally and spiritually, to re-engage the world around us. It takes us a while to shift our perspective from our fears and our hurts

and ask what ***the deceased*** would want us to do in a tragic, frustrating situation.

You probably know that in the Jewish spiritual tradition, you sit Shiva for a year after a death. It is a prescribed time for mourning. And it is about the right length of time after most deaths. But at the end of the year, they hold a formal service to bless the deceased and release the mourners from their season of mourning. They spiritually nudge them towards what comes next in their life. We usually need a nudge from the community, don't we? It usually takes our sister, one of our best friends, to suggest a way forward we hadn't thought about yet because we just get stuck.

Our couple went home. You can see them lying in bed, in the dark, just before falling off to sleep. One of them says to the other, “What would he have wanted?” It is a spiritually fecund question. It has imaginative life. It invokes our faith.

Not simply, what do I need? Although that question remains with us for years. But now, also, a different perspective on that pain and tragedy, “What would he have wanted?”

When we love deeply, it is so hard for us to have that relationship torn from us. We don’t want to leave the life we have known together. And in a moment of faith, a change of perspective, a new insight, we become open to

a new relationship with them after death. We figure out how to honor them. "What would he have wanted?"

In our story, the dispirited disciples are enlivened by the new perspective of faith that the risen Christ provides them, so they ask him to share a meal before he continues on. This feels good. This is right. We need more of whatever it is that he is offering. Great friends make us feel like that, don't they? Like a new day…

And Jesus breaks the bread. It hearkens back to the last time that the disciples were together with Jesus in the upper room, sharing the last meal together. And Jesus broke the bread and said a blessing over it.

How many times did they break bread together over the last three years? It is from the common things we

share that we remember our essential character, which transcends life and death. And it is that essential character that we would like to honor with a new relationship after death, extending the legacy of those loved ones that we mourn, by thinking together around the question of ‘what would he have wanted? What has she wanted? They have wanted?’

It is love and faith in healing.

And in that moment, they recognize the risen Christ, and the risen Christ vanishes. They got what they needed, the spiritual key of faith. They can see with new insight. The lock just opened. They get it.

When we met these disciples, they were headed away from Jerusalem. Where were they going? Anywhere away

from the pain and tragedy they experienced. They were spiritually meandering in a holding pattern.

With faith, with a new perspective, connecting the dots in a wider pattern of meaning, they are ready to rejoin the land of the living. We can't go back to the way things were. Rationally, we know this. But spiritually, emotionally, subconsciously, it takes us a longer time to get to the point where we actually get it.

We have to go forward, towards a new place of healing and new, different relationships with the deceased and with each other. We can know what Jesus called "the Kingdom of Heaven"; it is the 'communion of saints', the joy and love and community we share with each other

here and now, as well as whatever greets us in the afterlife.

So when we Christians gather, we read our scriptures together to open us to a new perspective of faith. And we break bread together, to invoke the Holy Spirit, that connects us to the wider “communion of saints”, the great unbroken circle of love that binds us together with those that have gone before us that made possible our lives in gratitude, the great unbroken circle of love that binds us to all those that will come after us that fill us with such hope. Vertical and horizontal.

I gave a presentation to the Doctors at Overlook Hospital on what I’ve discovered through the COVID pandemic, and I said, “I’ve discovered that Christianity is

a germy religion! We share one cup, one loaf. We lay hands on each other in blessing. We hug when others grieve. We exchange a kiss in support when we are ill or starting a new adventure. Christians are a very germy people."

And may you be so blessed to hug too much and care too deeply. May your people show up for you when you are distressed as well. May they walk beside you like the Spirit of the Risen Christ when you are trying to figure it all out and breathe their germy breath of life upon you to restore you to your better self. May they guide you to a new understanding, a healing faith. May you know a spiritual family of support. May God shine through you quite in spite of yourself. Amen.

Our first reading comes from Isaiah. It took on particular meaning after Jesus died. The expectation for the Messiah was one of victory. It was a long and difficult process for the earliest Christians to come to understand what actually took place, rather than what they had hoped would take place. I read from Isaiah 53, verses 1 through 5.

2He grew up before God like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no stately form or majesty to attract us,
no beauty that we should desire Him.
3He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.
Like one from whom men hide their faces,
He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.
4Surely He took on our infirmities
and carried our sorrows;*b*
yet we considered Him stricken by God,
struck down and afflicted.
5But He was pierced for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him,
and by His wounds, we are healed. *c*

Our second reading this morning is rich with symbolism for how we heal from trauma through faith. I read from Luke 24, verse 13 through 35.

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles[a] from Jerusalem, **14** and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. **15** While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, **16** but they were so involved, they took no notice of him. **17** And Jesus said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.[b] **18** Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" **19** Jesus asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth,[c] who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, **20** and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.[d] Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. **22** Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, **23** and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. **24** Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." **25** Then he said to them, **6** Was it not necessary that the Messiah[e] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" **27** And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. **28** As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. **29** But they urged him, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So

he went in to stay with them. **30** When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. **31** Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. **32** They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us[f] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” **33** That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. **34** They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” **35** Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.