

Third Week of Easter
Sermon for April 6, 2008
Raymond Raney

Acts 2:14a,36-41
Psalm 116:1-3,10-17
1 Peter 1:17-23
Luke 24:13-35

The Road to Emmaus. It's not so much of a place as a journey. It reminds me of the Road pictures.

Remember the Road pictures? I watched them as a youngster on TV. Dorothy Lamour, Bob Hope and Bing Crosby repeatedly followed the formula journey of two guys and a girl on adventures toward some goal for the amusement and excitement of audiences around the world. Lamour was always a bit smarter than either Hope or Crosby, and Bob played the foil to Bing's witty repartee. There probably were moral lessons in that series of films, but I don't remember them. What I remember from all those hours in front of the TV screen, besides the humor, were the caring and the love shared by three friends regardless of the trials and tribulations they faced.

That's the perspective that came to me this week as I pondered the incident in today's Gospel. The Road to Emmaus: such an apt metaphor for continuing the journey of Jesus and the Disciples to Jerusalem with two of the disciples taking off after the crucifixion and resurrection. Here we have Cleopas and his friend fleeing Jerusalem. They were told that Jesus was risen, but they're not convinced, so they run. They run, unlike the members of the inner circle who lock themselves in a room and hide.

Hiding's not such a bad idea. They're afraid, just as we would be if we were in their place. The Romans have crucified their teacher and what's to keep them from following up with eleven more crucifixions. After all, the Romans weren't shy about killing rebels. They were scared to death.

I can only remember being scared to death once in my life. It was October 1962. President John Kennedy came on the television and announced there were nuclear missiles in Cuba, and we were going to blockade the island. And he warned that if there were an attack anywhere, it would be considered an attack on the United States. I was scared to death that we were going to have a nuclear war.

I ran and hid in my room, and I prayed to God to spare us. I didn't want to die. I was scared because I knew there was no place to hide and there was no place to run to. I think I remember crying from fear.

That's the anxiety: of fear. Where do you hide when you're afraid? What if they find us?

I'd much rather run. If I'd been a disciple, I'd have been with Cleopas on the road to somewhere else. I'm not really into waiting to see if the Romans are up for more crucifixions. Out of sight, out of mind.

It's taken me a long time to face stuff: difficulties, people I disagree with, situations I'd just as soon avoid. I think the term is "conflict avoidant". I've always been a people pleaser, so when things hit rough water, I'd just as soon quiet the waves. And if I can't quiet the tumult, I can run somewhere else.

I don't know about you, but I have a lot of places to run to: There's always the movies or television, though movies combine escape and hiding: being in a room with a lot of other people who can't see each other. We just sit in the dark and lose ourselves in the fictions created by others.

Books, novels are always good. Life gets so complicated sometimes. There's order and certainty in fiction. I myself like a good mystery. I was talking to a priest friend of mine and she likes mysteries also. That set me to wondering why. I think it's because mysteries have a certainty to them: the good will eventually triumph. That doesn't always happen in this world.

Whatever it is: movies, TV, books, whatever you want to name, they all can be ways of running away. They are all roads to Emmaus.

Emmaus is that mythical destination we all yearn for. Someplace that will be a refuge from what confounds us. That place to which we flee when the questions press down on us and the answers seem too elusive.

Emmaus is the journey, not the destination. Emmaus is the process by which we turn away from the lives we lived and seek the will of God after we realize we have "erred and strayed from God's ways like lost sheep" and we answer the call of the Lord to repent.

Repent, Peter extols those guilty of crucifying Jesus. Repent, don't just feel about what you've done, but change your ways of thinking and acting and feeling. Peter urges them to turn away from the pressures of the world and seek the company of the Lord.

Cleopas and his friend are told by Jesus of the ransom that was paid through the crucifixion. They are given the insight of the resurrected Christ to trust in God, and they don't even recognize Jesus when they talk with him.

It was not until Jesus shared a meal with the two disciples that they realized who he was. That's what we seek: To find Jesus as we flee the dangers of our lives; To find Jesus in the journey to Emmaus; To see Jesus in the faces of those we encounter as we journey from doubt to faith.

Shortly, in the Eucharist we will say: "Risen Lord, be known to us in the breaking of the bread." This is not an idle request. This is the yearning that dates back 2,000 years: to know "the Lord is risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon."

As we travel the roads of our lives, as we seek refuge from the tumult that surrounds us, we need only open our hearts to the love of God for Christ to enter our lives, and guide us to understanding the mystery of God love for the human race, and the gift of Christ.

Alleluia! The Lord is risen!

The Lord is Risen indeed! Alleluia!