

My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. God of our Eastertide minds, hearts and spirits, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts always be acceptable in Your sight. Our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

God seems to specialize in allowing our dreams to first be betrayed, then flounder, so that we're left in this sea of uncertainty about not just what we saw, but about who we are.

These two disciples who are returning to Emmaus were totally despondent. Let's remember, this is Sunday of the Resurrection, and these are ordinary average guys who had seen all that had gone on from the previous week, from the triumphant Palm Sunday parade to Jesus causing a ruckus in the Temple to the trial and the crucifixion. Although they may not have necessarily been involved in the crowd that shouted down Pilate and exhorted "Crucify Him!", they saw all that had happened to whom they thought would be the one to overthrow Rome, not become its latest victim and die in another crucifixion. Because in those days, crucifixion was a form of public service announcement to anyone, "See this??"

See what happens to the ones who dare to defy the will of Rome? So you'd better behave, or this too will happen to you".

And if we had witnessed all of that, we might have been despondent, also.

We are told that the problems in the middle east have been intractable and impossible, politically and culturally, and that the best thing we can do in countries where the people are oppressed is to let them flail about on their own and figure it out for themselves. And I am reminded of the Arab Spring. At that time about a decade ago, first Tunisia and then all throughout the middle east citizens began to demand change of their oppressive governments. Citizens who were under the thumb of their regimes for many years began to rise up. Some countries had changes that occurred by their own peoples, such as in Tunisia and Egypt where dictators were toppled non-violently.

Other countries had foreign powers intervene such as in Libya and Syria. The resistance movements to those leaders has been anything but non-violent, and those dictators responded accordingly with varying results.

But a couple of researchers looked at the difference between violent and non-violent uprising and their likelihood to achieve social, political, and economic change and found that non-violent movements are twice as likely to achieve their goals over violent resistance.

Twice as likely.

Now true, non-violent movements need time, organization, and people power, but civil resistance seems to succeed not because it melts the hearts of the powers in charge, but because it attracts a larger and far more diverse base of participants, making costs to the regime to control that rabble unsustainable. Successful resistance movements employ mass participation, produce regime defection, and employ flexible tactics.

And what struck with me about this research is that little sound byte about “mass participation”. In the joy of Eastertide, when we proclaim the risen Christ to be King of Kings, Lord of Lords, are we in effect bringing back the expectation of these two poor guys on the road to wave Jesus off the Cross, and Out of the Tomb, to come and “Hosanna: Save us!” from the problems we face?

Or maybe we should conflate our hopes and dreams with those who claim power in the name of religion that they will come and save us on behalf of the God of Christ, or the God of Jacob, or Allah?

Because paradoxically, when we claim to be acting in the name of God, we want that to be the God that we would bend to our will, our wants, our dreams, our hopes, and not the God of Abraham. Because the God of Abraham is the God of Christ. The God of Jacob. The God of Mohammed and all of Islam. Our collective God is one of justice, mercy, and compassion, not the God of those poor two fellas on the road to Emmaus.

So I can really identify with those two guys on the road because, like them, I get so downtrodden in the world and pre-occupied with how humanity's hopes and dreams are repeatedly crushed by sovereign powers in the United Nations that I, too, wish that maybe a quick bombing run against our national adversary of the moment will solve it all. That the blessed U.S. will once again ride to the world's rescue emotionally, morally, and spiritually to put us back on the right path with our military might. Military might that I know and have seen.

But **that** line of military might thinking is precisely the mistake made by the guys on the road to Emmaus. They don't want to be walking the walk of mourners. We want the easy answer. But we also know it won't work. So we convince ourselves there's no way to save a too-troubled world. That our hopes are too remote to be realized. That we have lost hope in the Lord and God's goodness because deliverance is unseeable.

And in that, we have forgotten that we cannot control God. We have forgotten that the power of God is in non-violence. We have forgotten that the power of change is in mass participation, not the power of the few at the top, and certainly not at the gunpoint of the army, although military might makes us feel quite powerful. Maybe even God-like, which is its attraction, after all, isn't it? We have forgotten that Jesus does not identify with nor promise salvation through an earthly king, no matter many armies they have, and no matter what promised in their campaigns.

We seek too-easy answers when our change is hard. We seek violent change of having our hopes realized NOW through people we thought we could control, when

we actually should begin to expect that the change that we want is the one that we study every week. Christ, who does not bend to any ruler or power, and also rejects those who seek to be too holy or pious.

Our resistance is not resistance to the reign of Christ. But it IS resistance WITH and BECAUSE OF the reign of Christ. Christ promises in resurrection that even when the promises of peace, love, and kindness and justice seem dim, God's commitment to the "least of these" is sure and will prevail.

But we can still find it hard to walk the resurrection path, because sometimes that path is the one of suffering first before victory over death and new life ever enters the picture. The Emmaus fellas were walking AWAY from Jerusalem—AWAY from fellowship, AWAY from belief, AWAY from hope. Sometimes, our call is to face and embrace what is disappointing, disheartening, and to draw strength from those who have also experienced the same. And to come up with a new plan to live out God's grace.

But that comes about because only when we raise our heads to have eyes that will see, not be downcast.

And have ears that will hear and fulfill the Scriptures and the Gospel, to be encouraged and not downtrodden. To come here and draw strength with the living water from the well.

In modern America, we foment violence more often than not with unkind words, and broadcast them to all that can hear through social media and other channels. But Christ is not on the side of those who seek power through domination, but those who look through their problems and disappointments and find God's path.

We will not be broken, even if our bodies and spirits are threatened. We will not be cowed, because we believe in the extraordinary power of ordinary people of faith. We will always take the side of those scrambling to make a living, the underprivileged, the "ordinary average guys" as Joe Walsh might say, the downtrodden, on the Road to Emmaus. Doing the Right Thing is often the Christian Thing, and in ancient Rome it paid dividends such that it brought down an Empire and changed the world. It sometimes got you crucified, too. And in that freedom, of knowing that God is on your side no matter what happens to your body, your Spirit should soar.

I'll leave you with these final thoughts. Next time we see an invitation to seek the easy path, let's see if it's the faithful path. Let's turn to one another and ask if we're for non-violence, for solidarity, for mass participation, and for organizing resistance to tyrannical actions, thoughts, words, and thinking? Or when we post a facebook response or knee-jerk opinion to a friend or co-worker, is it a call to justice or a capitulation to our compassionate exhaustion? The old, "What would Jesus Do" question remains a thoughtful one that we need to take much more seriously into our hearts, minds, and lives.

And so, remember Emmaus. Remember we have all that we need. Remember that the rest is up to us, to act, to tell, and to invite others *en-masse* so that we truly can change the world. Because that's only possible when we're all in the game.

And for that, thanks be to God, Amen.