

Note that the bulletin has last week's sermon title (*The Unseen Risen Christ*). And while that is still fitting for the Sundays after Easter, this sermon is entitled *The Road to Emmaus: Transforming Moments!* Many churches this morning are reading the lectionary story of the Road to Emmaus, how the Risen Christ appeared to two disciples (Cleopas and Simon), walked and talked with them, but they did not recognize him. A favorite line from the story is that Jesus "*walked ahead, as if going on further,*" but it was near evening, so they urged him to stay with them. We get a key lesson from this: that Christ would not then, nor now, force himself on anyone. As in John's vision in the book of Revelation, Jesus says "*I stand at the door and knock.*" We ultimately have to open the door of our minds and hearts, and invite God in.

One of the reasons that Luke 24 ("The Road to Emmaus") really sticks in MY mind, however, is that it was used as a central teaching by a favorite professor at Princeton Seminary. When Dr. James Loder was teaching, he would occasionally slow down, pause, and have a teary moment. When someone is so moved, you know some deep experience is affecting the mind and heart, something worth paying attention to! Prof. Loder not only showed us the depth of his heart, but he also had an incredible academic mind! He incorporated Psychology, Philosophy and Science into his Theological book, entitled *The Transforming Moment*. Prof. Loder, with his big heart, also made himself available to students for one-on-one counseling time, and students reported that he shared amazing insights and prayers. So we all listened closely and read his book carefully. I've been re-reading it, and will do my best to relay a few key ideas.

The central point of the book seems to be that Life is full of "transforming moments" and these transforming moments come from a place, or a spirit "beyond" ourselves, which we call God, Risen Christ, Divine Spirit, etc. Loder formulates a sequence that he calls "Transformational Logic." It goes like this: A "Transforming Moment," also called a "convictional experience," starts with some sort of **Conflict**. Fair

enough, life is full of conflicts, they are inevitable. Next comes an **Interlude for Scanning**. Sounds right, as we all *ponder* ways to understand or resolve a conflict. We might confide in a friend, or we might sit quietly in prayer. The third step is a **Constructive Act of the Imagination**, also referred to as *Insight, Intuition, Vision, and A New Perspective*. I'd also add the word "reframing." Here, Loder makes a theological leap, saying that we have ordinary practical intuitions and insights, but we can also be open to spiritual guidance that can also be called the "Holy Spirit," the "inner teacher," or what the prophet Elijah called a "still, small voice."

The Road to Emmaus does exemplify "transformational logic" in the lives of the two disciples. The **conflict** in their minds and hearts is that Israel, as a people, is under oppressive Roman occupation, and they are looking for a Messiah who will save them, perhaps even militarily. But the One who was the most powerful, in word and in deed, was crucified by the powers that be, so his followers were confused and left without hope. The second step, the **interlude for scanning** is their long walk to the town of Emmaus when they ponder and discuss all the things that had happened. In the Emmaus story, it is a spiritual scanning, since the "stranger" who joins them, and discusses their holy book with them, is the Risen Christ.

For all of us with faith, the second scanning step can be very spiritual, asking or praying for deeper insight. We note that *Cleopas and Simon* said "Did our hearts not burn within us while he talked to us on the road?" I note that *John Wesley*, founder of the Methodist church, said that at one evening worship, while hearing interpretations of the book of Romans, he found his heart "strangely warmed." *Prof. Loder* recounts a transformational time in his own life: After watching his father die from brain cancer, Loder went into a long depression; everything in the world seemed dull and empty. He said that as a philosophy major in college, he had come more *to think* than *to pray*, but decided he would give prayer more of a chance. His prayer started as an angry challenge: "God, If you are there, then do something!" But the answer came back, and I quote:

like *“warm life, a gentle electricity that started at the bottom of my feet and rushed through my entire body. I felt the Presence of God’s Spirit in a palpable sense. I began to sing, what no good philosophy major should sing, Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine!”*

In our gospel story, the third step in transformation, that of ***insight, intuition, or vision***, turns out to be the insight of Jesus Christ himself. It is transforming because the Spirit of Christ is always turning our worldly views upside down. Remember he told his followers that they would find life *only by losing their life*, by giving it away, serving, even sacrificing. And here in the Emmaus Road story, he teaches two disciples, from their own Jewish scriptures, that the Messiah, the anointed one to save Israel, must suffer. Surely he would have pointed to scriptures like Isaiah 53 that speak of the Messiah being a “man of sorrows,” “well-acquainted with grief,” “wounded for our transgressions,” experiencing in himself the sin and suffering of the world.

Personal Transformation can be as simple as a changed or new perspective. I learn continually from other faith traditions. Sister Melanie Svoboda, of the Sisters of Notre Dame, speaks of the Catholic saying “Offer it up.” It basically means that suffering in life is often beyond our control and inexplicable (no great answers to the question “Why”)... so we “offer it up”... to God in prayer; we share it with the God whose face we see in Jesus Christ, the face of one who is “familiar with grief.” Buddhist insight might help us to “reframe” suffering as something we experience together *with so many others in the world*. Christians sometimes say that our crosses to bear may be minor compared to crosses that others bear. When suffering, and we “offer it up” to the Spirit of Christ himself, He not only shares our wounds, our brokenness... but he *transcends them with a life, a love, and a purpose that is stronger than death*. He empowers us with courage and strength beyond this human body.

That leads me to a transformational story, a conviction of the Risen Christ, from the book by professor Loder. To make a long story short...On

a busy thruway, Jim Loder was helping someone change a tire... when another car, out of control, rammed and pushed that car on top of him. Five ribs broken, one lung bleeding, one thumb torn off, skin torn from head to foot, but Loder never lost consciousness. His 5 foot, slight wife, put her hands under the bumper and kept praying and repeating "In the name of Jesus Christ." She broke a vertebra in her effort, recalls that she lost consciousness for a few seconds, came to, and was surprised to see that the car had been lifted off her husband! Loder recalled: "I felt a steady surge of life rushing through me," and he had two solid assurances... how deeply he loved his wife and two little daughters, and that the disaster would have a purpose. He kept feeling that "*life was pouring into me from a Gracious Source beyond the power of that accident to damage or destroy me.*" He had an assurance of life greater than death! Even as he entered surgery, he felt a "life power from somewhere beyond rushing into his body." He even assured the surgical staff that he would soon be well, and sang a few bars of "Fairest Lord Jesus!"

This car accident convictional experience is at a whole different level than most transforming moments... but it powerfully shows an actual transforming moment, of sensing the Presence of a Spirit beyond ourselves, and calling on that Christ Spirit to be for us a power greater than death. Interesting that for Loder this rush of spirit was described by him as a spirit of love, a Love that is stronger than death.

In conclusion, whether we are faced with a simple conflict, despair or even death, we can ponder, even pray for insight, courage, and guidance. Often we can reframe our thoughts. We need not fear conflict, yes, even in church, since we trust there is an inner teacher, the Holy Spirit... to guide us, lovingly, into new perspectives, and new life. As Jesus' way challenges the ways of this world, his insight and guidance can turn our world upside down. It can give us a resolution or new path we did not expect or imagine, and the love and courage to follow it. We have sung in faith: Christ is Alive, Christ is all around us... Let's open our hearts to His transforming power. Amen.