

All seminary students who intend to serve the church as ordained pastors are required to spend the equivalent of a full semester working as a chaplain through the Clinical Pastoral Education program, something referred to as CPE. I did my CPE training at Maine Medical Center following my first year in seminary. The patients I was assigned were hospitalized for multiple reasons. And, I remember one very difficult week when five of my patients faced imminent death. The words of one of those patients will stick with me forever. As I was feeling overwhelmed by so much death, I read today's gospel lesson to one gentleman who had only hours to live. He responded to me saying, "That is my favorite story in scripture because there is always an Emmaus." We prayed together and that night he died. The faith of that man and his words are forever burned in my memory and heart. **There is always an Emmaus!**

As Cleopas and his friend travel the road to Emmaus, they travel a road of broken dreams. Their words and their hearts are heavier than any supplies they might be carrying. Disappointment and grief have blinded their eyes and their hearts to the truth and to reality. In Jerusalem, they had learned the devastating news about Jesus' death. And, despite having heard what the women and other disciples had reported about Jesus now

being alive, they continued to focus on his death. They had **so** hoped he would be the one to bring redemption to the oppressed people of Israel. And now, after that crucifixion, these two disciples have concluded Jesus was **not** the one. They did **not** understand how he could be alive or how the transformation of life Jesus had begun could continue. For them, as they left for Emmaus, it was still Good Friday.

But their experience with the stranger along the road and at dinner in Emmaus ended up transforming their disappointment to joy and hope. When the disciples heard Jesus blessing the bread for the meal and saw him break it and give it to them, they suddenly began to understand. They recalled the glory of Jesus in his last days. And, they remembered how they had begun to gain new insight on the road, when Jesus had recalled for them the great stories of Israel's past and compared them with himself. These actions provided a telling insight into the reality they had missed. Though Jesus disappeared from them, they now knew they had experienced the presence of the resurrected Lord.

There is always an Emmaus. Luke's story about the disciples on that road is very instructive for us and it is **our** story. Like the disciples in this account, we, too, can miss the resurrected Jesus in our midst. But, also like them, we can use our experience in recalling the deeper truths of

scripture to transform our lives. You see, our experiences on Sunday mornings and at other times in worship, help us repeat again and again the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. We recall the scriptures and place them in the extraordinary context of Jesus, the Christ. And, we recall that powerful moment at the Last Supper, when he gave his closest followers bread and wine, his body and blood, to provide nourishment and meaning and direction for having a fulfilled life. For us, in so recalling, **we are there** on the road with Cleopas and his friend. In so recalling, **we are there** with the disciples at the Last Supper. In fact, such experience is a kind of **reverse** post-traumatic stress syndrome. Because, instead of trauma, we recall and relive the most glorious reality of knowing the resurrected Christ and feeling that we are as much in the presence of God as were Cleopas and his friend.

There is always an Emmaus. In worship, we experience both examples from today's gospel account of reliving the resurrected Jesus. Both are critically important – Word and Sacrament – as we recall who and what we are as followers of Christ no less than the two men on that road. The church recognizes this every Sunday morning as we experience Word and Sacrament. We hear the scriptures and experience them interpreted for us. This is our story! Then, with the word of God still resonating in our

minds, drawing out the meaningful contexts of our lives, we reach the altar rail and literally experience the reality of love and grace and the one-ness we have with God and each another. **Everything** is focused on the love that is God – that is the resurrected Christ in our presence. This experience regularly re-empowers **us** to walk with the resurrected Jesus throughout the rest of the week, at work and home, at school and play.

Yes, there is always an Emmaus. Again, and again, like the disciples on that road, the resurrected Jesus can show us that the forces of evil and destruction will **not** prevail against the power of love. Again, and again, we recall that we **are** the body of Christ – and so in our lives, in our actions and in our words, we can reach others, helping them understand the presence of the resurrected Jesus.

Yes, there is always an Emmaus. As Jesus did with the bread and wine, making it his body and blood, God in our midst empowers **us** to discover in the ordinary what is truly holy. The encounter of two disciples with the resurrected Jesus came in the most familiar and ordinary of ways. These two disciples came to know the risen Christ by walking and talking on a road, and sitting down with him to eat and pray. We encounter him, too, in common, familiar ways – by welcoming each other and talking with each other about our ordinary lives, by eating together and sharing together

in this meal. The resurrected Jesus is with us, available to us, within us – **always**, as we live our ordinary daily lives.

Yes, **there is always an Emmaus**. You see, we are the unnamed companion walking along with Cleopas. And, the resurrected Christ is always inviting **us** to recognize his presence in the experiences of our lives, in the experiences of our life together as a community. Christ joins himself to us as **we** are traveling on the way and we, too, begin to feel our hearts burning within us. Opening our hearts and our minds to God's presence, we then can live out in our time what he lived and died to prove. As we share the broken bread, it nurses our broken faith and nourishes our courage to leave our grave-clothes behind and vacate the vault of **our** defeated and broken dreams. Renewed by the resurrected Christ, we respond by moving from where we are to meet the world head on, ready to face the **risk** and **change** that God's presence allows. As our hearts burn within us, this burning becomes a light that empowers **us** to reveal God's love to others, continuing God's ministry through our acts of compassion and mercy, welcoming and caring for **all** others, and living into God's dream of justice for this broken world.

Oh, yes, as I think back to my experiences during CPE and to the last moments I spent with my dying friend, I will forever remember the witness

he was to me. His words will forever be burned into my heart and mind and I, too, must respond by saying, **“Yes, there is always an Emmaus!”**