Encountering a stranger

In times of personal or social distress, human beings tend to conserve their energy and time. Yes, it is the oldest part of the brain guiding us to protect life. Indeed, in the midst of distress, a good measure of predictability is welcome as a way of coping with the unknown and the seemingly chaotic. The comfort of well-known friends and family members is cherished, especially when the future is cloudy. At the same time, the presence of strangers can be easily questioned: Be they friend or be they foe? Are you here to take and harm or give and support?

Two dispirited and fearful followers of Jesus have fled the city of Jerusalem, no doubt because their association with Jesus – crucified as a state criminal – could easily lead to their arrest, torture, and death. And, then, a stranger joins them on the road. Surprisingly they do not hurry away from him. Rather, they pour out their anxiety and utter disappointment and he listens to them. He listens and then interprets the Scriptures, demonstrating how the ancient stories respond to their present need and situation. No fantasy. No “it’s all good.” Rather, listening to their pain allows him to offer the medicine they need.

The evening draws near and they invite the stranger – who appears no longer to be that strange – to stay with them and join them at table. It is in that gesture of lifting the loaf of bread and giving thanks to God for this gift of the earth and human labor, they recognize, with utter astonishment, who he is. No stranger after all. No threat to their well-being, and certainly more than someone well versed in their holy book. He is the One raised into a new form of life, a new form in which they can partake, his cosmic Presence made available to them at table, in the sharing of bread, in drinking the fruit of the vine.
What we see in this story for the Third Sunday of Easter is the **origin of our form of worship**: people gather; Jesus comes to them in the Word of God; and there is an interpretation of those ancient stories for our current need. The people gather at table where thanks is given to God over bread and wine, and all receive the living presence of the risen Christ before they are sent forth to serve the neighbor in daily life. Luke would want us to know that in this pattern of worship, in this ensemble of actions, Christ continues to act among us and is with us today.

On another level, the Emmaus story announces that **the cosmic presence of Christ is with us in the most ordinary ways**: in the gifts of the earth, when one or two or three are gathered in his Name, in the reading and discernment of Scripture, in every effort to sustain and support life, health, and wholeness, in every generous act of service.

And there is one more layer of this story, so appropriate and needed in our time: being open to the unexpected presence of Christ in the stranger – and **being that unexpected presence of Christ to others who may not know us** but yet could benefit from our safe presence: in protecting others by wearing masks, wearing gloves, and keeping a safe distance even though it may be an annoyance to do so; in leaving food or medicine or a note card on someone’s doorstep; in gestures and words of kindness and generosity in a time of uncertainty and fear; in steadfast giving to the community of faith and the rector’s discretionary fund. As we now hear of political leaders blaming China for this virus, we can resist the racist rhetoric that, sadly, will target people of Chinese descent.

As we gather at our many tables for household prayer, let us keep this refrain in our hearts and minds – **Be known to us, Lord Jesus, in the breaking of the bread** – in the bread we break in our homes (*Hymnal 1982 S171*).

**Preparation**

We have entered into the Great Fifty Days of Easter that will bring us to Pentecost. While some Christian communities keep only Easter Sunday and then return to “things normal,” it is not so for the majority of Christians throughout the world. We keep seven weeks of “walking in newness of life,” to quote St. Paul. Worship in the household can take place anywhere but it is most appropriate at **table**. After all, the risen Christ frequently reveals himself during meals: at Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35); in a Jerusalem apartment (Luke 24:36-43); by the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-14). The color appointed for the Easter season is **white**, the color that reflects and scatters all visible wavelengths of light. Do you have a white **tablecloth** to dress your table? And speaking of light, it is most appropriate to a light a new **white candle** for household prayer in Easter, a reflection of the Paschal candle that will adorn the church space once we return to worship together. Anglican spirituality holds that **all the senses** reveal God’s presence – not just texts and speaking or singing.
Green blades or budding branches, flowers and incense mark festive holy days among us and are rightly incorporated in household worship. Should you have a crucifix, a cross, or an image of the risen Christ, let this holy artifact be present as you gather to pray.

Centering

Make the sign of the cross and say
Alleluia. (+) Christ is risen.
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Hymn

Join the Christ Church Choir, Congregation and Organist Dr. Mark Brombaugh in singing, “That Easter Day with Joy was Bright” (Hymnal 1982 #193)
https://soundcloud.com/user-351072722-73531756/hymn-that-easter-day-with-joy-was-bright

That Easter day with joy was bright:
the sun shone out with fairer light
when to their longing eyes restored,
th'apostles saw their risen Lord.

His risen flesh with radiance glowed,
his wounded hands and feet he showed;
those scars their solemn witness gave
that Christ was risen from the grave.

O Jesus, king of gentleness,
do thou thyself our hearts possess,
that we may give thee all our days
the willing tribute of our praise.

O Lord of all, with us abide
in this, our joyful Eastertide;
from ev'ry weapon death can wield
Thine own redeemed for ever shield.

All praise, O risen Lord, we give
to thee, who, dead, again dost live;
to God the Father equal praise,
and God the Holy Ghost, we raise.
Collect

Pray this prayer

O God,
whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread:
Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work;
who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Word of God for the Third Sunday of Easter

The reading of the Gospel is the primary reading of the day and should always be read. It follows after a reading from the Hebrew Scriptures, a Psalm, and a reading from the early church. The first three scripture texts can be found here:
http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Easter/AEaster3_RCL.html

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17
Listen to the Choir of Lincoln Cathedral England sing the psalm at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79sThR6MT_I

1 Peter 1:17-23


Read the gospel aloud without rushing. Allow the images to enter your consciousness: let them find a home within.

The Holy Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Glory to you, Lord Christ

Now on that same day two of Jesus’ disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”

They stood still, looking sad. 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?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.
“Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 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. 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.”

Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Christ.
A meditation on the Gospel reading by Evelyn Underhill

Lord! Open our eyes that we may behold you! Open our ears that we may recognize your voice. Not in some special religious experience, some great moment or perfect setting or private meditation, but just as we go along the common road.

Teach us to recognize and welcome you in ordinary, homely events, for it is there that we shall surely find you.

Teach us to stop arguing and listen to your voice: to be simple and quiet, to accept even when we do not understand, or when your deep and gentle teaching comes into conflict with our deepest prejudice, our longing for personal comfort, our hard and fast beliefs.

Lord! Give me courage and love to open the door and constrain you to enter, offer all my treasure, whatever the disguise you come in, even before I fully recognize my gift.

Come in! Enter my small life! Lay your sacred hands on all the common things and small interests of our lives and bless and change them. Transfigure my small resources, and make them sacred. And in them give me your very self.

When out of my homely circumstance, you feed me – then my eyes are open to the presence I long for and never understand or fully grasp.

Come and abide with me!
Meet me and walk with me!
Enlighten my mind!

And then, come in.
Enter my humble life with its poverty and its limitation as you entered the stable of Bethlehem, the workshop of Nazareth, the cottage of Emmaus.

Bless and consecrate the material of this small and ordinary life.
Feed and possess my soul.

Evelyn Underhill (1887-1941) was an English Anglo-Catholic, a pacifist, and a teacher of Christian mysticism to the millions of Anglicans and other Christians who read her writings, in particular her two classics, Mysticism and Worship. Weary of the rationalistic and protestant color of much Anglican life and its conformity to English culture, she was drawn to the deeper wells of early and medieval Christianity and became an ardent supporter of Anglo-Catholic reform in the Anglican Communion, with its strong emphasis on sacramental life and social justice.
Prayers for the church, the world, and all who are in need

*These intercessions may be used, adding others in each household*

Let us pray for Christ’s people throughout the world; for our presiding bishop Michael, our bishop Gregory; for all who minister in the Name of Christ; and for the whole people of God. *Silence*

Let us pray for peace; for goodwill and cooperation among nations; for the well-being of all people; and for all who strive for justice and peace. *Silence*

Let us pray for enlightened leadership in this time of pandemic; for policies and practices guided by sound medical wisdom; and for the good will to persist in life-saving restrictions. *Silence*

Let us pray for the many who struggle with illness, poverty, unemployment, loss of homes, lack of healthcare, and little food and drink; for those in any need or trouble at this time; and for the will to serve our neighbors in need. *Silence*

Let us pray for those who, at risk to their lives, serve the common good in ambulances, grocery stores, hospitals, medical clinics, and pharmacies; for fire fighters, police officers, home caregivers, and social workers. *Silence*

Let us pray for the faithful departed (*speak their names aloud*); and all who grieve the death/s of family members or friends. *Silence*

Let us praise God for those in every generation in whom Christ has been honored through charitable works and the ministry of social justice. *Silence*

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*The Lord’s Prayer*

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your Name,  
Your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
Now and forever. Amen.
Receive these prayers, O God,
and transform us through them,
that we may have eyes to see and hearts to understand
not only what you do on our behalf,
but what you call us to do
so that your will might come to fruition on earth as it is in heaven.
We ask this in the Name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and forever. Amen.

Blessing
Make the sign of the cross as you say
The God of peace, who brought again from the dead
our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep,
through the blood of the everlasting covenant,
make us perfect in every good work to do his will,
working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight;
And the blessing of God Almighty, (+) the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among us, and remain with us always. Amen.

Organ Music “That Easter Day with Joy was Bright”
Enjoy listening to this lively organ work, composed by Christ Church Director of
Music Emeritus, Dr. David Dahl, and played by Christ Church organist, Dr. Mark
Brombaugh: https://soundcloud.com/user-351072722-73531756/that-easter-day-
with-joy-was-bright-dahl-mark-brombaugh-organist

Giving thanks at table
Use this thanksgiving whenever you are at table for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

Blessed are you, LORD our God, Ruler of the universe,
You nourish the entire world
with goodness, tender love, and mercy.
Blessed are you, O LORD, you nourish the entire world.

We bless you, O Holy Three,
for you provide food and drink to earth’s people,
Gifts of field and vine, the work of human hands.
Turn our hearts and hands toward those who have no cup, no bread,
and strengthen us to serve each other in the bonds of friendship.

Blessed are you, O Holy and Life-Giving Three,
You are blessed in your care for all who pray for daily bread.
Amen.
Notes

Introduction: “Encountering a Stranger,” Fr. Samuel Torvend
Image 1: Janet Brooks-Gerloff, “The Road to Emmaus,” 1992
Opening acclamation: The Book of Common Prayer 1979
Hymn: “That Easter Day with Joy was Bright,” in The Hymnal 1982 #193
Collect: The Book of Common Prayer 1979
Biblical readings: The New Revised Common Lectionary adapted for Episcopal Use, 2006
Image 2: Emmanuel Garibay, “Emmaus,” 2000 – for more on Filipino artist Emmanuel Garibay’s art, go to https://imagejournal.org/article/recognizing-the-stranger/
Prayers and Lord’s Prayer: The Book of Common Prayer 1979
Concluding Prayer: Revised Revised Common Lectionary Prayers, Nashville: Consultation on Common Texts, 2002; administered by Augsburg Fortress Publishers
Blessing: Adapted Birkat ha-mazon from Lucien Deiss, Springtime of the Liturgy, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1979