

The Rev. Shannon Preston  
April 30, 2017

*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.*

In college I lived for four months in Ireland. It was in a small town called Spiddal, in a rural part of the Gaeltacht—the area where people still speak Irish. I would often go on long walks through the countryside. It was enchanting and idyllic with lots of blackberry bushes, stone fences and small cottages. I recall walking *one* day the same route I often did and I met an Irish man who, also on his way somewhere in his tweed and driving cap, stopped me for a little chat. After we exchanged a few niceties, he told me about the island I could just see across the bay. It was once a man, he said. The hill to the right is his belly and the other, over there, his head. And, if you listen to them close enough, they're still living. At the end of (enchanting) our conversation he recited a poem by Yeats for me called "The Drinking Song":

Wine comes in at the mouth  
And love comes in at the eye;  
That's all we shall know for truth  
Before we grow old and die.  
I lift the glass to my mouth,  
I look at you, and I sigh.

(Forever since that day, older Irish men hold special place in my heart.)

For the rest of my time there, I lived in a different world. I walked a little bit lighter with a heightened sense that anything could be waiting around the next corner. There was, suddenly, something more to this place I thought I knew. I received something from this man that opened for me the landscape around me, the place I inhabited and he gave me new eyes to see what was all around. I am grateful for these encounters that change me and how I see in some way, and our gospel today is about this opening of our eyes, but with and to faith.

The collect, or prayer of the week—the prayer at the beginning of the service that changes from week to week—asks, prays on this third Sunday of Easter that we open the eyes of our faith—just as these two person's walking to Emmaus eyes were opened to see Christ in the breaking of the bread.

These two disciples walking were lost in the news they had received, lost in all they had heard and the pieces of Christ's life they had witnessed. They are engrossed in what is being said about Jesus' death and these new rumors of his resurrection. They are so engrossed in the way they think things are that they miss the reality waiting in front of them—the Risen Lord, the Messiah—who walks with them—and not just for a moment but for miles and miles. Their eyes as they walked are like those given to us by what we hear that causes us to fear, to doubt, to be angry or hate, to be so engrossed in a way we think the world is—we may miss the reality of Christ right in front of us.

It's Easter, the season we are still in, this defining piece of our faith, and it holds a promise of hope, life, resurrection and joy.

We can get comfortable staying in a place of pain, sorrow, despair. It is easy to get stuck in the hopeless and mundane, but that is not the reality of faith. We come here each Sunday, or more often, for a reason, a hunger. We come here to receive a different way of seeing, a different way of being in our world than what we are offered so often in our day-to-day routine.

Life lived with faith is one that sees the world around it, our life within it, through new eyes. *That* then impacts how we go about our day-to-day living. We are meant to see differently than a world that appears hopeless, lost or divided beyond repair. We are here because we believe, we trust God is here. Even if we question this, somewhere we believe, we hope God meets us here, through suffering, through death, through hopelessness and doubt. We believe Jesus Christ is here with us directing us, calling us and leading us to this converted, reconciled, resurrected life that only the God of love can give to us. And, the joy of resurrection is deep, it is not shaken by ups and down, it is a joy that encounters the God of the whole universe. It is a joy that sees Christ in the breaking of bread and follows the Holy Spirit to ways of love and hope we could never create ourselves. It is God's gift to us, to see, to live with eyes of faith.

And it is a gift for all of us. These disciples walking to Emmaus were blind to Christ, they doubted and questioned, they bickered and complained, but their eyes were opened to see the God they longed to know, the Savior they thought was dead but once had believed in, before so much had been complicated and questioned, politicized or persecuted. And after all this, they see Christ in a new way.

Redemption and resurrection are joyous, but there are elements of them that open us to seeing in a way that is different than what we knew before. Eyes of faith see things possible beyond the limitations we impose on ourselves, even those limitations that we find so comforting—that can't be for me, that is surely for someone else, this was 2000 years ago and following Christ doesn't really mean all this for me. Eyes of faith cause us to see differently, to move differently than eyes without faith. And this is the gift we bring to the world.

I would never have seen a man in that island were it not opened to me by another, but it changed how I inhabited that place I thought I knew in some way, from that time forward. And, may we know, something greater than Yeats Drinking Song—a truth that is beyond what wine alone reveals. But the truth of faith, of a God who has risen and redeemed, and appears to our eyes of faith with gentleness, honesty and love and joy, and who sends his Holy Spirit to lead us and be with us as we inhabit a new way of seeing all that is around us.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen

Amen.