

This story from Luke's gospel is for me – and I expect, for many of you – my favorite resurrection story. It has that quality of real life to it; it speaks of transformation; and it ends in unmitigated joy.

And it revolves around a theme which is central both to our daily lives and our life, and more specifically to Christian faith and identity: journey.

As human beings we journey – literally, emotionally, metaphorically. We journey. We journey, from youth to old age: always; from innocence to wisdom: hopefully; with hope and expectation: longingly; with the companionship of others: if we are very fortunate.

Perhaps the most poignant phrase in all the gospels appears in this journey we hear of today, centered on a perfectly ordinary verb in the imperfect tense: “we had hoped”.

Our journey of life is, by turns (if we're lucky!) rich and boring, expansive and confining, fulfilling and hollow. If we're really lucky the final order's reversed, and the conclusion a moment of joy, from which vantage point we can look back and be able to say “God has been good to me.”

Sometimes the journey gets interrupted before old age or wisdom comes – it seems a violation of the universe when people die before their time. I remember hearing a phrase very similar to “we had hoped” as a friend, quietly weeping, packed up her teenaged son's “personal effects” in an ICU room where the ubiquitous curtain screened his lifeless body. “We had hoped.”

Sometimes the journey's sidetracked, when we, or those we love, find our lives disrupted by the things of life which seem to violate any sense of planning we might have: when addictions return, or jobs go away, or people can no longer live in relationship, or – well, you can add your own sidetracks to that list.

“We had hoped”. In this case the grammatical reality of that verb tense – imperfect” seems so sum up only too well the reality it describes. This is not how we expect our lives to be in a perfect world.....“We had hoped”

Such a familiar phrase! For some it's only transitory, for others it's ultimately defining: “we had hoped”.

That Luke's gospel contains this stark phrase is, for me, comforting. It confirms that the gospels – and Luke in particular – “get it”, they understand the journey we're all making, they know about grief and loss, and they're willing to say what we sometimes don't dare to say: that crucial hopes have collapsed, that pain has overwhelmed joy, that darkness has dispelled promise. “We had hoped”.

For some, the journey that Luke's gospel describes ends here. In the midst of the pain of

suffering and loss the remainder of the story is lost to them. It isn't enough to say that if you go far enough along the way you'll find that the story of Jesus – and your life – will change – even if, in your own personal experience or that of the community of faith, that's proven to be true. Words fail to convict, for some, for those whose reality is dark and who cannot see the light.

For those two disciples – Cleopas and his friend – their willingness to continue the journey, to continue walking with this stranger did, actually, change their lives, and did so in quite remarkable ways. Going far enough was transformative for them.

As the story of Thomas reminded us last week, few are offered the luxury of such a personal encounter. We who were not there have to take these two at their word, and not all of us can do that.

But there are other confirmations. Those of us who have experienced faith as transformative of our lives – transformative in a positive, life-giving, life-enhancing way – we **have** journeyed on to Emmaus. With hearts and minds opened to the new possibilities that experiences of transformation invite we're able to take those two disciples' description of their encounter with Jesus at their word.

For those of us willing and able to do that, we now have a responsibility. In a very profound sense we're invited to recognize that we made the journey to Emmaus as much for those unable or unwilling to make it themselves as we did it for ourselves. We thus have a responsibility to bring back to them the realities, the truths we encountered on the way and share those truths, those realities, with them.

As a community of faith one of the ways we share those truths and realities is in what we do this morning: so anyway, the gospel tells us: we break bread and share wine; and even if we're not ready for the transformation that's possible in this meal, the meal **will** transform us.

Theologian Bruce Epperly says this about the Emmaus Road story:

“There's a wonderful Latin phrase that's applicable to this experience: “solvitur ambulando,” translated “it will be solved in the walking.” That accurately describes what happened on the way to Emmaus. As their bodies move, so do the spirits of Cleopas and his friend. Their dialogue with Jesus awakens the energies of resurrection, and enables them to see their grief and disappointment in the larger panorama of divine grace and hospitality. As their unknown companion bids adieu, they invite him to supper, and then discover in the breaking of the bread that they are welcoming the Risen Christ”.

There is no way that they would have experienced resurrection at their dinner table apart from their willingness to companion a stranger. And when Jesus vanishes with the breaking of the bread they're left with warm hearts and good news to share with Jesus' other followers.

Life is Eucharistic. Christ comes to us in formal celebrations of communion. He also comes to us whenever we share meals with open hearts. Christ comes in the hungry stomachs of the poor and our hungers for healing. We'll discover Christ in walking with those who hunger for grace. And we'll find our own wholeness as we invite Christ to be our companion on the daily journeys of

life.

This wonderful story invites to make some grammatical changes: to change that past imperfect tense into the present progressive: “We hope” We hope as we journey, from youth to old age, from innocence to wisdom, with hope and expectation, in the companionship of others. May we make that journey to Emmaus and, together return to our world carrying that message of hope.