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An Easter Devotional: Resurrection Sunday

Luke 24: 13-35

“Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over (vs. 29a, NIV)”

The passage of the Walk to Emmaus is one of my favorites. The unexpected unveiling of Cleopas and his companion’s eyes when Jesus prays and breaks the bread is an eloquent testimony of Christ’s presence in the people and in the most unpredictable circumstances of daily life. The disciples, disheartened and frustrated, share their discouragement and narrate to the disguised stranger, with a certain tone of reproach, “But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.” The journey to Emmaus becomes burdensome due to the lateness of the day, hunger, and the danger of the road. But nothing compares to traveling with the burden of living with an unfulfilled promise. I dare to put into the mouths of the disciples the following phrase: “We are traveling on this dangerous journey to Emmaus. And, as if that were not enough, we are moving from hope to disappointment and no future is forthcoming.”

A re-reading of this passage illustrates another type of emotional blindness and lack of discernment: There are customs that obscure the gospel. The disciples, in their conversation with the disguised stranger, give a detail that seems marginal: “In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.” Apart from the frustration and despairing words of the disciples, the narrative suggests an alternative to the discouraging words, which provokes a prophetic rebuke from the disguised stranger. He rebukes and reprimands the lack of faith of the disciples and their ignorance of the prophet’s words.

Some interpreters suggest, first of all, that it is possible that the second disciple accompanying Cleopas was his wife. This possibility is linked to the narrative of the women at the tomb. But in the context of the first century, the announcement of the women is received with suspicion and uncertainty, at best. In other words, the inclusion of the story of the women suggests that Cleopas’s wife insists on providing the stranger with another alternative that has a glimmer of hope. Even with male legitimate corroboration, they still doubt the women’s version even with the involvement of the angels. These men know that something is happening, but they are incredulous to the words of the women and the angels!

I fondly remember when a gentleman who taught a Sunday School class on Easter Sunday asked, “What would have happened if Christ’s disciples had understood the Scriptures and accepted, without a doubt, that Christ had



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risen?” Promptly, a sister from the Caribbean answered, “If it had been up to the men, we would still be ‘fishing for langostinos’ (prawns in English) in the river.” Another sister stated, “We were the first to know that Christ had risen, and they still insist that men discovered the faith. Until when sisters and brothers, until when?” There are customs and traditions that prevent us from seeing the Risen One and discovering the Gospel in people and circumstances outside the “usual order.”

Languages have their contextual meanings. For example, in the original version, the Caribbean women used a Puerto Rican idiom in responding to the teacher’s question, “If it had been up to the men, we would still be fishing for “*güavaras*” (*langostinos*; prawns in English) in the river.” In the Sunday School class, the Puerto Rican population burst into laughter. However, the Mexican and Central American population was confused by the phrase “fishing for *güavaras*” and it had to be translated to “*langostinos*” (prawns in English). It was then that the community joined in the humor of the phrase (although many men did not like the Caribbean sister’s response). I emphasize, languages—even the same language—have codes of meaning that are not accessible to people outside a particular context.

This biblical passage, and especially verse 29, has a particular meaning in Syriac, a language that comes from Aramaic and is found in the *Peshitta*, a version of the Bible in Syriac used by ancient and present-day faith communities usually located in the Mediterranean world.

In Spanish versions, as well as in English, the language of verse 29 is limited to indicating that the day is coming to an end, that the day is declining, or that it is almost night. The typical interpretation suggests a chronological transition—the sun rises and the sun sets; day is gone and dusk begins. Exegetes usually emphasize the hospitable action of the disciples, very common for the first century and strange for a person in the contemporary world. Hospitality to foreign people is not alien to the daily life of communities in the first century.

In Syriac, the phrases “**for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over**,” “for it is getting late, and the day is now declining” or “it will soon be night” or “it is getting dark” have a cosmic dimension. These expressions suggest that the whole cosmos is overwhelmed by darkness, by hopelessness. The same frustration and feeling of uneasiness are not exclusive to the disciples’ lives but the life of the whole cosmos. There is a Caribbean expression that one uses to describe when they see dark clouds of an impending hurricane, or the sudden change in the sky when a devastating storm is approaching. The expression “*nos arropó la bruja*” or “*nos arropó la mier...*” (similar to the English expression “when sh** hits the fan,” apologies for the unspoken words; however, remember that these words have infused meanings) illustrates the arrival of something terrible and the inability to act. The phrases highlight an unexpected and overwhelming fatalism in daily life. In the passage, it is not just that “the sh** hit the disciples’ fan” but that all creation, the entire cosmos, is overwhelmed, oppressed, and hit by



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despair. The phrase in Syriac aligns with Paul's passage in Romans, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly..." (Romans 8:22-23).

There are frequent occasions when an artistic piece captures the intention of language. There are two paintings that illustrate the heaviness of the cosmos and its overwhelming force on the disciple in the Syriac biblical text. Daniel Bonnel has a painting (<https://fineartamerica.com/featured/the-road-to-emmaus-daniel-bonnell.html>) whose cosmos is progressively dominated by darkness. Carol Foret (<https://fineartamerica.com/featured/on-the-road-to-emmaus-carole-foret.html>) has an illustration that suggest, with its colors, the emotional relationship between the disciples and the cosmos— both desperate. The black, gray, and red tones contrast with the white color of the disguised stranger. For those of us who cannot narrate and understand the passage in the *Peshitta* in Syriac, these images create a mixed reaction— everything is dark and continues to darken ... and there is a glimmer of light that is gradually revealed. The *Peshitta's* translation in Syriac (most likely from Koine Greek) offers the community a novel interpretation: This community of the body of Christ reminds us that the resurrection is not a limited experience between death and life, and certainly not merely an individualistic reduction of Christ's resurrection. The event of life in Christ's resurrection has cosmic implications that disrupt every moment and every place. Even creation must experience the disguised stranger as the Risen One in whom all created things are subject to salvation! I hope that this interpretation provides a glimmer of hope for Christian communities living in situations of conflict.

In the face of certain hyper-individualistic trends and indifference towards social justice, this passage from Luke reminds us that the disguised stranger is the resurrected Christ and must be discovered in the least expected places on our journey of faith. Furthermore, given the environmental crisis on our planet, creation seeks liberation from its bondage by capitalist interests and developed countries. The resurrected Christ offers His church the opportunity to discover him by sharing bread with the community foreign to our contexts and to be awestruck by the light of the resurrection that breaks into the cosmic darkness of a universe in search of salvation.

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