

## Return to Jerusalem

The headlines this last week are quite jarring to say the least.

Oil selling at minus \$30 a barrel.

The unemployment rate here in the Islands topping 23%, the highest in the nation.

And leaders, from Washington DC to a whole host of states, insisting on reopening the economy sooner rather than later, with the honest ones conceding that some people need to die so that money can be made.

In the midst of all of this calamity, we could not have a better week to re-hear the story of the two disciples walk to Emmaus, and their return to Jerusalem.

Because, as a world, we are all of us on that very same road.

Think about it.

Who and what are the gods of our society?

They are without question the Economy, Power, and Celebrity.

The Economy, money, is what the world worships.

If we can't put a price on it, it has no value.

Which is why the price of oil going below zero is so wonderfully ironic.

Because when we get down to it, money is an illusion.

It is a fiction around which we have organized ourselves for a very long time.

We hoard it and argue that it must be wisely used and cautiously spent.

And so we find a myriad of excuses to refuse to fund a livable wage, or food stamps upon which people can survive, or healthcare for all.

But when a crisis hits, and the people at the top are put at risk, suddenly, the sky is no limit, and trillions of dollars can be manufactured — out of the nothing that it is.

We are Christians.

We have been baptized and taken as Christ's own forever.

In that baptism, we die to this life and to the rules of this world — vowing to take on life as God gives it.

Life in abundance.

Life in sharing.

Life in refusing to claim anything as mine:

It's all ours.

Because it's all God's.

And here we are, on our own road to Emmaus.

Allow me to explain.

The disciples walking to Emmaus are leaving behind the revolution of Jesus.

They are rejecting God's kingdom that is breaking into the world.

They are rejecting the radically changed ways of relating to each other that Jesus brings.

They are returning to the status quo of Rome: of empire, money, power and celebrity.

They can't believe the good news of the resurrection, that Life has swallowed up Death.

They can't believe the incredible news that in the end, love wins — all the time!

So they return to Emmaus, which actually means they are returning to Rome, to the empire.

Back to buying and selling.

Back to power as the way of the world.

Back to life as we know it "must be."

Then Jesus shows up.

And as they walk with him, he opens their eyes to see the truth of our existence.

That love is the living central power of all creation.

That love is the foundation of all reality.

That love can, if we allow it, infuse and transform our lives as individuals, as communities, and indeed, as a world.

And thanks be to God, in their stunning encounter with the Risen Lord, the two disciples turn back to Jerusalem!

Back to this new life!

Back to this new life that says to Emmaus, to Rome, you've got it all wrong!

We are on the road to Emmaus right now.

We think that we have to "re-open" and go back to "normal."

We fear that the great god Economy may never regain its strength.

And so this very week, in places like Georgia and Texas, we sacrifice the most vulnerable among us, minimum wage workers, minorities, the poor.

These we sacrifice on the alter of the Economy by opening nail salons, and beauty parlors and retail outlets.

There is a better way.

We can return to Jerusalem too.

We can use this time to insist that our leaders and power brokers and billionaires change course.

We can insist that we create an economy that is equitable for all.

We can insist that global warming be taken as the traumatic and existential threat that it is to all of humanity – and to all of life on this planet.

As a people, we can step into the faith of our fathers and mothers and trust in God completely and totally.

We can embrace the truth that we are all of us worth far more than what we produce or consume.

We can remember, in the true sense of that word, that we are creatures made in the image and likeness of God!

Every human being is priceless, yet we live in a world that has reduced everyone to a price.

We are at a moment in human history upon which vast consequences hinge.

The last 300 years have created unsustainable damage not only to the planet, but to human dignity and worth.

That lack of sustainability has become magnified in the last generation.

We dare not return to Emmaus, to Rome, to the empire.

Let us instead listen carefully to the words of our Lord, and at long last take them to heart.

Let us practice them, trust in them, even be willing to die for them.

So, may we love our enemies.

May we walk the extra mile.

May we give our coat and shirt to the one in need.

May we cease worrying about tomorrow, about what we shall eat and what we should drink.

May we trust Almighty God to care for us just as she cares for the lilies in the field.

May we take the talents we have been given and be creative with them, as we envision new ways to live together on this fragile planet.

May we rediscover our enormous potential to see visions and to dream dreams!

If we do these things, we can create and nurture a society that is sustainable not only for the few and for this generation, but for the many, and for generations to come.

We dare not return to Emmaus, to the way things always were!

Let us return to Jerusalem, where something radically new is happening!

For too long we have given only sophisticated lip service to the truth of our faith.

Or we have reduced those truths to individualized, personalized, devotions.

But the God of Israel has never been simply about individuals.

The God of Israel has always been about this world and all of his people.

Jesus didn't die just for me, he died for us!

And he didn't die only for us, but he died for every single human being who has ever lived on this planet.

He died to redeem all of creation.

This is the truth of the gospel!

This is the truth that we need to recover if we are to return to Jerusalem!

And may I suggest one concrete step that we might all of us rally around as we summon the courage to return to Jerusalem?

Let us take seriously God's command to the people of Israel.

It's that one part of the law that has never been tried, as far as we know.

Let us declare a Jubilee Year!

A Jubilee Year isn't about shouting or parties.

A Jubilee Year is a year in which all debt is forgiven.

Not only the debts created by hurt feelings and damaged relationships, but all monetary debts too.

Let us demand from those in government a Jubilee year.

The forgiveness of all forms and kinds of debt; personal, national and international!

Which will allow us to rebuild a world that lives as God invites us to live.

"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 they returned with joy to the new life Jesus brings.

Can't we do the same?

+amen

