



April 2020 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Beloved of God –

“Our Emmaus”

One of the house rules in my childhood farm was that we weren’t allowed to bicycle or walk to town without permission. However, we five young siblings had a plot to break this rule and to sneak down to the Co-op store with the few pennies we had to buy some candy.

Two of us were elected to sneak off to the store – our youngest sister and myself. That afternoon we cautiously left the yard and walked down the hill to the store and its tempting treats. We made it to the store safely with no grown-ups questioning our presence, and we set off on our triumphant return, five small bags of candy clenched in our fists.

Now – fortunately or unfortunately – unknown to us, our Mother had some shopping to do at the store that day. And – fortunately or unfortunately – we could see and hear the old green Buick rumble its way down the driveway to the main road leading down the hill ... along the very road we were walking on.

Panic stricken, my sister and I ran as fast as we could. And – fortunately or unfortunately – between the store and our home was a concrete culvert and we ran to it, squeezing our bodies into this tight space.

We felt we were running for our lives. Running from our parents and a situation that had become unbearable. Hiding fearfully in a place that we hoped would be safe. It became our Emmaus. It was someplace, anyplace, away from the preceding events.

“Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.”

They were on their way to Emmaus. Someplace, anyplace, away from recent events. They were leaving Jerusalem. This, after hearing the remarkable news from the women that the tomb was empty, and that Jesus was alive.

And yet they can’t leave events behind. Their recent past haunts them. And they pour out the story to the first stranger who comes alongside them.

You know how it is. When we are traumatized, we often find ourselves telling the story over and over to anyone who will listen, even a perfect stranger: “I went into work and found a memo on my desk asking me to see the manager right away. Right then I knew that there was

going to be trouble.” Or: “It happened so quietly. The rest of the family had slipped out for dinner in the hospital cafeteria – and I was just holding her hand and humming softly when she just stopped breathing and slipped away.”

On the road to Emmaus, seeking to escape the horror, the two of them can’t help but pour it out. They tell about the mighty prophet Jesus who had been lynched in a horrible weekend of violent treachery. “We had hoped,” they say, “that he was the one to redeem Israel.”

“We had hoped.” I suppose this was the reason they had left for Emmaus – because they could no longer find any hope in Jerusalem. And they tell the stranger the story of tragedy.

And then the mysterious stranger begins to tell the story in his own words. But his story begins long before these past few days, reminding the two of the larger story within which these events take place. The stranger speaks of Moses and the prophets, interprets the scriptures, retells the story in a way that strangely warms their hearts and then, when invited to join them for the night, he is recognized in the breaking of the bread as the risen Lord. They then race back to Jerusalem.

We all know Emmaus – it is someplace, anyplace, safely away from recent events. Emmaus can be many things. But the amazing thing – the good news – is that Jesus comes alongside, and often in ways we least expect. Yes, in Word and bread and wine, but also in friendship, through a healthy touch, a listening ear, a gift of hospitality.

Emmaus invites us to see that it isn’t our unshakeable faith or evidence of deep spirituality that connect us with the risen Lord, but our openness to his presence.

May you journey with bright eyes to see and fresh ears to hear – knowing that the risen Lord is with you. Yes, even with you, and even at your Emmaus.

In Christ Jesus –
Shalom,
+Bishop Larry Kochendorfer

“The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)