

Easter Three

April 6, 2008

Text: Luke 24:13-35
Theme: A Splendiferous Crash

Many of you know that one of my favorite movies was *Zorba the Greek*. It's almost an Easter parable. In fact, on Easter morning a couple of weeks ago, I described the joyful scene of their dancing on the beach.

In that movie, Zorba convinced his young English boss to invest in building a special contraption Zorba envisioned that would bring logs down the mountain side to where processing into lumber would create badly needed jobs in the little village below.

So the contraption is built, a device whereby logs come flying down the mountain on pulley wheels running along cables. Down by the beach, a flag is waved for the first log to be sent down. The village priest steps up to bless this untried creation as that first log begins its run down the mountain. The log begins to fly down the cables faster and faster, vibrations begin to make the frames that hold the cables shake, and as the log reaches the bottom end it crashes disastrously through the platform with priest and people jumping for their lives.

The excitement and anticipation of the day turn quickly to gloom and despair. The young Englishman has invested everything in this fiasco, he's prepared to leave the island in despair. But Zorba confronts him. "Boss," he says, "I like you too much not to say it. You've got everything, except one thing — madness! A man needs a little madness or else... he never dares cut the rope and be free."

And as they stand there in the midst of that dismal pile of rubble, Zorba begins to laugh. "Hey, Boss," he says, "Hey Boss, did you ever see a more splendiferous crash?" A splendiferous crash? You have to be a little bit crazy to see beauty where the world sees only disaster.

It's still Easter in our Gospel text. Three days ago a man named Jesus was crucified. Gloom and despair. Two men are walking home from the city, dejected, hope is gone. And then a Stranger joins them on the walk and asks why their faces are so downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, responds: "*Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?*"

In other words, why aren't you gloomy, too? Just a week before crowds were cheering as One they thought to be the Messiah rode triumphantly into Jerusalem. But now? Now He was dead, placed into a tomb. The sound of that huge stone crashing into place over the entrance to the tomb seemed to shout "NO!" to life and laughter, to the "Hosannas", to the shouting and dancing in the streets. It's over.

At least, it seemed to be over in the hearts of those two disciples as they trudged their way home that Easter Day. But Easter is the very heart of the Christian faith. Easter is about the madness that yearns to be free of all the splendiferous disasters of this world, free to celebrate, free to dance, because HE IS RISEN!

Madness! He was crucified! It's madness to think He could live. Oh yes, they said, *"We had hoped He was the One to redeem Israel."* We had hoped. But, hey, it's been three days. So much for hope. Oh, some went over to the tomb, saw it was empty, but what does that mean? He wasn't there.

They were right. Easter is not the celebration of an empty tomb. There is no comfort, no reassurance in an empty tomb, it will still get filled back up some time. And we trudge along with these two characters from Emmaus.

"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe," the Stranger told them. And He began to teach them the Words of Scripture. And He sat with them at their table. And at that table, He took bread, He gave thanks, He broke it and began to give it to them.

And things became a little crazy. In the breaking of the bread their eyes were opened. They recognized before them the One who was crucified. But alive! Light flooded the darkness of their night. He was right there with them. And they said to one another: *"Did not our hearts burn with in us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?"*

"You know, tomorrow we had better go back to town and tell the others what happened." NO! It's Easter. You jump up from that table, you get your feet moving as fast as you can. This is news that must be shared, news that must be shouted. It's just too splendiferous to keep. It's Easter! Not just an empty tomb, but a risen Savior, a true and living person sitting with you at the table, a voice speaking to you, making your heart burn within you with new life, making you just a little bit crazy.

That is why the hallelujahs, the flowers, the bells, the special songs of joy on Easter. A voice calls to us out of death, a body is risen to life, giving new hope, giving reassurance. It denies everything we have come to believe about what is real. And you need a little craziness in the heart to make this splendiferous crash believable, you need His Spirit breathing new life into you.

But then, then He disappeared from their sight. Yeah. That is just part of the craziness of this story. Again and again, from early that morning it has been one strange thing after another, encounters that just didn't seem real. He appeared to Mary, to the other disciples later. And at first, it seemed none of them could accept it. It was just too crazy to believe. Until He opened their hearts.

And then? Then nothing could ever be the same. Those who just three days ago had run and hid in the darkness, now they stood in the streets, like Peter in our first reading, proclaiming to the world "He is risen!" How did some respond? "They're drunk!" Some. But some, three thousand that first day, went a little bit crazy. They believed that a new reality was present.

It was a new and bewildering era. Nothing could ever be the same for them again. Never again could it be as it was before He died and rose again. Something new was loose, emerging. Jesus was still with them, but in strange and unpredictable ways. The old and familiar patterns were gone. The disciples would have to adjust. It must have been just a little bit scary.

Some have suggested that Emmaus could be a parable for our Sunday morning worship time. After all, the story occurs on a Sunday. Early Christians soon began to worship on this day, usually in the evening. It was on this Sunday when Jesus walked with, sat with these two disciples. It was on a Sunday when He took bread, blessed it, and broke it with them. It was on a Sunday when their eyes were opened.

Last month Marilyn and I were returning home from our trip. And as our plane flew over Denver before landing, I could look down and see all the lights of the houses and cars. And I thought about all the people worrying about the things of our world — rising gas costs, war, housing markets falling apart, all the things that are on our minds most days. Old ways changing, the present often too perplexing to understand. The tensions in our lives between the good old days and the present.

And most, most of them, wanting to cling to the old, the comfortable routines, resisting the ever-changing chaos around them. But that brings us back to our story. In the presence of such radical change, those two disciples "*Got up and returned at once to Jerusalem.*" At once. They may have shuffled their feet going home that day, but they ran back to Jerusalem.

And there they heard the news, the world had changed, the others proclaimed, "*The Lord has risen indeed!*" Now what? In your life? Are you still trying to cling to some comfortable past? Are you still trying to coax Jesus to just "Abide with us?" Keep things comfortable?

Or are you ready for new possibilities? Are you ready for Easter? Are you ready for Emmaus? Are you ready for a little craziness? Does this strange Easter event open your heart, create a desire to share the joy, to run out into the world to shout out this splendiferous news? HE IS RISEN! [response] I hope so. Amen.