

*A baptismal meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Easter 3, May 8, 2011, dedicated to Luke Timothy Sittler Ahrens as he heads from Bowling Green/Ashland to Hilton Head/Chapel Hill on his road of life, to Thalia Renee Weygandt on her baptismal day, to Nora Goss, Martha Morlan, Misty Nichols, our 2011 Schumacher Award winners, to all our mothers and, always to the glory of God!*

## **“Keep Your Eyes Wide Open”**

### ***I Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35***

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*Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.*

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Today’s resurrection story teaches us that new life is discovered in the ruins and on the road if we keep our eyes wide open.

It is late on Easter Sunday afternoon as the sun is setting and two grieving followers of a great slain leader are lost in despair as they make their way west out and away from the city streets of the capital city. Three days ago, their leader was brutally murdered as he stood up for all humanity - especially for the concerns of God’s poorest children. Their leader had come to the capital one week ago to preach, teach and heal in a city and a nation torn asunder by hatred, greed and militarism. Three days ago, on Friday, his life was snuffed out as the sun was setting on all the good that he had accomplished in his short time on the earth.

Now these men have wound their way through the hills and valleys of Jerusalem and they are heading into the setting sun as they are approached by a stranger who asks what has been happening and why they are so forlorn. With sadness draped on them like a heavy cloak, these two disciples of nonviolence respond, *Are you the only one in our city who does not know what has been going on around here? What planet do you live on?* They trust this mystery man enough to continue: *We had hoped he was the one who could rescue this nation from its roots in hatred, violence and its addiction to war. We had hoped he would guide our movement to a place of economic equality and spiritual wholeness. We had hoped he would liberate our nation. He was our dreamer and our doer. But he was cut down in cold blood, and with this death, we fear his dream and all the good deeds he has done have died with him.*

The mystery man begins to teach them. *You sound like men of faith. But it seems like you do not know too much about scripture and prophecy. Let me help a bit.* And so he begins. He teaches them all about Moses and the prophets of old. He interprets all the writings in the Torah that point to the things “concerning himself” (Luke tells us). He clears the air. He makes sense of the despair that grips them. He opens their eyes.

We are drawn into this story as the mystery man reveals the mysteries of God. Like with any good storyteller, time passes as the stories unfold. The hills disappear. The sun finds its way to the edge of setting.

They arrive in a place the Greek text calls Emmaus. And one more mystery arrives for us. According to the Codex Bezae manuscript from the first century, the village was *Oulammaus*. This, according to the Greek Septuagint version of Genesis, is the original name of the place where God appeared in a dream to Jacob when he was traveling. Genesis 28:19 records, *And Jacob called the name of that place House of God (Beth-el), but it had been previously Oulammaus.* What happened to Jacob at Oulammaus resonates in the story

of Jesus and the disciples in Luke 24. God visited Jacob in a dream while sleeping on a “rock” (*cephas*) that he had set for his pillow. Jewish legends subsequently focused on this rock. So, this place of God’s revelation (with no such name) would have been known to these religious Jews by the shrine of Bethel, which Jacob built by the roadside following the visitation of angels and the revelation of God.

But do they “get it?” Not yet.

After a 7-mile walk to clear their heads and after the truth of scripture being revealed by a stranger on the road to “no place,” the men still haven’t figured out - in their heart of hearts - who this is and what he is telling them. They invite him in to dinner. Since it is Jesus (as we now know!), we also know Jesus never turns down a dinner invitation! So the three of them head inside. It is only now that they recognize him - when he takes, blesses, breaks and shares bread with them. At this point, their eyes are opened – wide open - and they realize and recognize who he is! It is the Messiah! It is the Christ! With the suddenness of that recognition, he disappears from their presence. Now they get it! Now he is gone!

Hastily and hopefully, they rise and run through the dusk all the way back into their city in ruins to tell the others about their “eyes wide-open” encounter with God! While they run, they ask each other, ***Didn’t we feel on fire as he talked with us and opened up the scriptures for us?*** All of the sudden, Christ is risen! All of the sudden, they believe that they have seen, heard, touched and felt the real presence of their teacher, their preacher, their Prophet of Nonviolence and Hope, their “healing one” (which is the meaning of “Messiah”)!

How many times in your life has God been right in front of you and you haven’t known God? How many times have you been so caught up with grief or success; worry or self-pride that you have not seen the truth unfolding right in front of you? How many times have been so hurt that you only focus on your hurt and not the healing that is happening?

How many times have you been on a road to nowhere and discovered it was a road to revelation?

How many times have your eyes been closed because of they were swollen with tears of true grief or self-pity or a combination of the two that you couldn't see what was right in front of you? How many times has your heart, your head, your eyes been opened wide to see the eyes of the person standing right in front of you?

In a little while, we will leave this place and head back to the road. We will be texting with our heads down, pushing shopping carts around stores, doing laundry or weekly bills, gardening or walking the dog, checking out employment opportunity listings or items for sale on-line or in the paper. We will be driving down the road we travel every day to work or school. We will be looking at the same streets, the same people, and the same circumstances of our lives. They may all look the same. But, the fact is, everything is changing, everyone is changing every minute of every day.

*This week my friend Mark told me, The Mark I was yesterday is dead. A new Mark is right here in front of you. I do not mean that I died completely, but every day, something dies in us and becomes part of our past. Every day as well, we are given an opportunity by God to rise in new life. We are given the chance to see things with new eyes, new hearts, and new attitudes. So, the Mark I was - full of whatever junk I carry around - is dead and gone. What if we all approached life this way? What if each road we traveled was new to us?"*

Mark is right you know. Each of us is a new creation today. Each of us woke this morning with a little crusty "sleep in our eyes." But each of us washed off the "crusties," opened our eyes and focused on this new day that the Lord has given us. As you look out upon this new "Lord's Day," you need to remember that the only person you can change is you. The only attitude and perspective you can change is yours.

Today, we have touched by the wide-open eyes of wonder in Thalia Renee. We have been touched by the wide-open stories and witnesses of faith from Nora, Misty and Martha. We have been touched by the Risen Christ on the road of revelation to a town whose name has been changed when God's opens the eyes of Jacob and later the disciples of Christ - just a few generations apart.

As you head out on to pathway today - with your eyes wide open - take the fourfold revelation of Christ with you. Whether on the road or at table with your loved ones or perfect strangers, remember him. Remember that the Risen Christ - **our "BREAD OF LIFE" - Takes . . . Blesses . . . Breaks . . . And gives himself to the disciples, to the world and each one of us.**

This fourfold action embodies the fullness of God's love for us. First, God comes to us and then God holds on to us in our pain and distress. Second, God touches us and blesses us in our times of need. Third, God breaks us in the midst of our suffering - and although this is the hardest part of the journey to God, it is where we deepen and grow the most. Finally, when the time is right, God gives us to others for their much needed healing and wholeness. In this final action, new life and the power of Christ's resurrection become real through our lives laid down in His name.

**Taking . . . Blessing . . . Breaking . . . And Giving. That is what Christ does for us every day - if we but look with eyes wide open.**

Keep your eyes wide open - for THIS is the day that the Lord has given you to see his revelation in this clear and present moment. Amen.