

Pivot Out: Preaching in the Age of COVID-19  
Road to Emmaus  
Luke 24:13-35  
The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry  
April 26, 2020

What we know is that there is so much that we just don't know anymore. As I wander around my house, trying to find new places from which to work, new places that will inspire me, I am overwhelmed with waves of grief, for what I think may be coming, for what I think we may have lost, for the people who have slipped through the realm of this life. I wander and I am numb, I wander and I am overwhelmed.

This is not what I thought it was going to be. This is not what we thought it was going to be!

And I am sure that is what they were saying as they traveled from Jerusalem to Emmaus, 7 miles away. It is three days after he was killed. They were with him in the garden that Thursday night as the soldiers came. They stood by watching as Judas kissed and betrayed, they were there. They instinctively moved back, faded into the shadows, as the soldiers advanced, their faces no longer visible in the flickering torch light, then quietly they turn and run; fast and far, away.

It's been four days since that night he was taken away. He was killed on Friday, lain on a slab in a tomb on Saturday and now it is Sunday, the women arrived early saying his body was gone, the tomb is empty, he is risen. Risen? Seriously, Really?

What they know is that this is not what they thought it was going to be. Not for them, not for us.

On that Sunday afternoon, as the two disciples walk, as they walk and talk, moving away from Jerusalem at a rapid pace a stranger comes among them. Not someone they know. He asks what they are talking about, what is it that you are so upset about? "Are you kidding me?" They say.

It's as if the stranger has been residing under the dark side of a rock these past few days in Jerusalem.

But they tell him of all that has happened. How Jesus, the one they had been hoping for, longing for, praying for, the one who was going to change everything, how he was handed over, crucified, died, buried, but now some of the women say he's alive.

So the stranger, the one they think they do not know. Starts talking to them and they, interestingly enough, start listening to him.

They walk, they listen, they learn. He, the stranger, explains it all to them. How the law and the prophets from Moses on forward is all leading up to Jesus. They nod, they listen, they ask questions.

Eventually it gets dark. The two disciples invite the stranger to come on in, have dinner stay the night. It's what you do when the stranger is beginning to become a friend. It seems like he wants to go on, so they ask him again. The ask you make, when you want to let the person know it was a real invitation, not just one of those polite ones we make. This is real. Come on in. Have dinner. Stay with us. Be with us. It's not what we thought it was going to be, but you are someone we want to know. Because sometimes, when it is hard and strange and not what we thought, sometimes it helps to have new friends.

So he stays. They set the table. He takes the bread, he blesses it, he breaks it, he blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them and it is then that they know him. They see him. It is HIM. It is Jesus.

He leaves them. It's enough to have seen him, in the flesh, with the bread.

Friends, this is not how we thought it would be.

When I am scared, numb, overwhelmed with grief, and just peeved at the world. That is when I tend to turn in, curl up, hunker down and hold tight.

What the disciples learned as they journeyed toward Emmaus is that, when we pivot out, when we resist the temptation, to hunker down, and self-obsess, when we instead turn toward that which we do not know, those we have not met, when we pivot out, that is when we learn what we need to know, that is when we encounter who we have not yet met, to take us where we never dreamed we'd be.

When we pivot out, and open up and listen, when we truly hear and learn and then invite people in---it is then that we will see that the risen Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, the way the truth and the life, calling us to something so much more.

But what does all of that mean, to those of us here on our screens?

Here I am on my screen and you are there on yours, each of us removed physically from one another. Others of us are without screens with which we can hide behind or to connect. People who, by calling or economic necessity, must now daily risk their lives so that all of us may continue to live. What does it mean?

In this time, how do we pivot out to the stranger, how do we connect with the people we do not know when science, government, and practical sense tell us to stay home and remain safe?

What strangers do we have the opportunity to listen to? To learn from?

I wonder what it would be like for us to read news accounts and editorials from people who have very different perspectives than our own? Perhaps you believe that sheltering in place makes much sense. What of our sisters and brothers who believe otherwise? Have I something to learn from them? Or shall I just pivot in, and stay in my own echo chamber?

After truly taking stock of who is dying from this virus, what if we used this time to pivot out and do a crash course on how race and poverty are systematically tied and how these two factors are now clearly the engine driving the likelihood that a poor person of color has a much greater chance of contracting and succumbing to COVID-19. What if this is the time for us to rework in our lives and the institutions all that upholds the status quo of poor people of color dying more readily?

What if it is time for us to embrace the poor people's campaign for a livable wage?

What if we were to say, I have some money that I can give, to help the thousands of people in our state, who find themselves newly unemployed and suddenly lacking money to buy food to feed their families. What if we were to pivot out and make a contribution for \$100 or more or less to the Bishop's Fund for COVID Relief? What if?

\$100,000 has been offered to match dollar for dollar what we collect. As of Saturday morning, yesterday we have now raised, \$70,000 I am overwhelmed with the generosity of St. Paul's, Jackson, All Saints', East Lansing, All Saints, Pontiac, St. Luke's Ypsilanti, Christ Church, Cranbrook, St. John's Royal Oak, St. Patrick's Madison Heights, St. Andrew's, Waterford, St. Michaels and All Angels, Grosse Pointe Woods, and our cathedral and the more than 326 individuals who have contributed thus far.

I believe we are now within striking distance of being able to give \$200,000 to the food bank distributors supplying food pantries in our diocese, join me, pivot out, let us give a portion of what we have to friends we have not yet met.

When we pivot out, listen, learn and share, it is then that Jesus Christ, alive and risen is revealed to us. It is then that we know, that in spite of it all, even though this is not what we thought it would be, God is here, with us all.