

*Co-Resurrecting Christ*  
Luke 24: 13-35

Rev. Tom VandeStadt  
April 19, 2020  
Congregational Church of Austin, UCC

This pandemic has been hell for me in some ways.

With that said, I acknowledge that my privilege has shielded me from the suffering that others are experiencing. I'm not sick, I still have a job, I can work from home, and I'm not sitting in my car for hours in the food bank line.

Nevertheless, I've found it difficult adjusting to this new way of life. I loved how I lived prior to the pandemic—there were things I enjoyed doing, places I enjoyed going, people I enjoyed being with in person.

Then suddenly, all of that ended. Life as I knew it changed, fast.

At first, I thought I had adapted pretty well, and that it wouldn't be that bad. But very quickly, I stopped sleeping. I stopped riding my bike and lifting weights at the gym. I stopped going to all my favorite places, and seeing all my favorite people. I lost my appetite, and seven pounds.

And the no sleep continued.

After a while, I started riding my bike again, but not as often as before, and not nearly as far. I started lifting weights in my garage, but I missed the people with whom I lifted at the gym. And I still can't go to my favorite places or be with my favorite people.

And the no sleep continues.

I have a confession to make—I hate zoom.

Doing a quick zoom meeting with three or four people is OK—catch up with one another for ten minutes, get your business done in ten minutes, and you're done. That's OK.

But hour-long zoom meetings, two-hour long zoom meetings, 4-hour long zoom meetings, with lots of people, where I just hang back and don't say a word—they do a number on my body and brain. On zoom, I feel like Chuck in *Better Call Saul* when he goes outside. Zoom zaps me and drains me and depresses me. I need to get a space blanket.

I'm the kind of person who won't call the vet on the phone to make an appointment for my dog. I go in person to make the appointment. I don't like talking on the phone, I like going in person to interact with people. I'll never do drive-thru at Starbucks. I always go inside.

So having all of my interactions with other people mediated by a computer screen or a phone depresses me. It's the very definition of hell.

And the no sleep continues. That too, for me, is the very definition of hell.

In these difficult times, I've been asking myself what "Christ is risen!" means. Where in my life are those words real to me—not just a slogan, but a real felt experience? How do I experience the presence of the living Christ in my life, right now?

That's a tough question for me. Let me back up a bit to explain why.

Some years ago, I asked myself the question, who resurrected Christ?

That question seemed odd because the answer seemed obvious—God did. God resurrected Christ. But I didn't think that was the only answer, or the complete answer.

I came to believe that we resurrect Christ too. I came to think of us as co-resurrectors of Christ. And why not? We're accustomed to thinking of ourselves as co-creators—we co-create creation with God. So why not co-resurrectors—we co-resurrect Christ with God.

I read the Road to Emmaus story as one in which two people, by the grace of God, co-resurrect Christ. Through their grace-filled interactions with one another, they together experience the presence of the living Christ, they together co-resurrect Christ.

At first they don't know that's what they're doing. But in the end, their eyes and hearts and minds open, and they realize that's what they've been doing—co-resurrecting Christ in their midst, between them, together.

How do they do that? How do these two co-resurrect Christ together?

It's a combination of things.

First off, they open their hearts and souls to one another. They share their deepest heartache and grief. They're real to one another. They listen to one another. They have empathy for one another. They have compassion for one another.

And through this their hearts bond. They become soul friends. They love and trust one another. They care for one another.

What else do they do?

They tell one another stories about their encounters with Jesus—everything they heard Jesus say, everything they saw Jesus do. And they remember what others said about Jesus—what others heard Jesus say, what others saw Jesus do. And they tell the stories their spiritual ancestors told, stories from their sacred books. They tell and retell these stories, over and over again. Each time, remembering new details. Each time, gaining new insight and deeper understanding. And together, they come to a deep shared understanding of Jesus, a deep shared love for Jesus, a deep shared experience of Jesus.

And through this their hearts bond. They become soul friends. They love and trust one another. They care for another.

What else do they do?

They show hospitality by sharing their bread. The Greek word for "hospitality" is *philoxenos*. *Philo* means "love" and *xenos* means "stranger." *Philoxenos*—love for the stranger. It's the opposite of *xenophobia*—fear of the stranger.

*Philoxenos* is the love through which a stranger becomes a brother, a sister, a kindred soul, and therefore, no longer a stranger. It's the love through which a stranger becomes a companion, a *companero*—literally, a bread sharer—and therefore no longer a stranger.

They show hospitality by sharing their bread.

And through this their hearts bond. They become soul friends. They love and trust one another. They care for one another.

And lo and behold, Christ is risen. Christ is risen, indeed!

Through their love for one another, their trust in one another, their care for one another, their companionship with one another, Christ becomes real to them, alive to them.

Their eyes open, their hearts open, their minds open, and they suddenly realize that the living Christ is present to them within the grace-filled bond they've created with one another.

Jesus himself came near and went with them, Luke says.

Not literally, not in physical form. In spirit.

Jesus himself came near to them, as they came near to each other, and bonded together over Christ, through Christ, with Christ.

I've had those experiences with people. I've experienced Jesus coming near to me as I've come near to others. I've co-resurrected Christ together with other people. It's powerful. It's beautiful. Some of these Christ is risen interactions have really changed my life.

But now I'm finding them much harder to come by. Because of physical distancing. Because of shelter-in-place. Because of the relentless isolation. Because I can't come near to people.

In my spiritual practice, the resurrection of Christ doesn't mean much to me unless I'm co-resurrecting Christ with other people. And that's become a lot harder to do. This pandemic is forcing me to look for new ways to experience the presence of the risen Christ. This pandemic is forcing me to ask—if I can't experience the presence of the risen Christ in my close-proximity relationships with other people, are there other ways I can experience the presence of the risen Christ?

That's where I'm at in my spiritual life now. Struggling to be open to new ways of experiencing the presence of the risen Christ.

So far, I haven't had that experience, and that's been hell.

But I'm staying open, and getting hungrier and thirstier for that experience. I'm knocking on that door, hoping it will open.

If you're going through some kind of spiritual struggle now, welcome to the club. Believe me, you're not alone. Times of disruption often disrupt our spirituality. And that can seriously disorient us, and depress us. We can get really hungry and thirsty for an answer, for an experience, for a sign, for a reassurance that everything will be ok. And these can be slow in coming.

If you're experiencing spiritual disruption or turmoil now, it's OK. Don't think there's something wrong with you. It's one of the few things that's normal, in these un-normal times.

I pray that you'll be strong and resilient, that you'll open-hearted and open-minded, that you'll gain greater insight and deeper understanding, and that through this experience, you'll grow and mature in some significant ways.

Christ is risen, indeed!

I have no doubt that Christ is risen.

But I do long to experience the risen Christ in my life.

I pray that my longing will be fulfilled, and that your spiritual longing, whatever it is, will be fulfilled as well.