

The Third Sunday of Easter

April 6, 2008 (8 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.)

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Psalms 116:1-3, 10-17

1 Peter 1:17-23

Luke 24:13-35

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Where do we first encounter Jesus? Think back a bit. It was probably in Sunday school when we were very, very young. It might have been a picture of Jesus, a mimeographed sheet to color and take home, after the teacher had given us the morning's lesson. Or, and this my own personal first encounter, a colorful picture of Jesus that clung, as if by magic, to a flannel board at the First Methodist Church of Irving Park, Chicago. After a flannel board, mimeo sheets were never adequate again. My mind tells me that Jesus was a shepherd at that first encounter, but I may be mistaken.

Of course, whether picture or flannel board, Jesus remained a two-dimensional figure. We could learn a lot about Him – what He had said and done – but we couldn't get very close to Him; we couldn't sense His presence.

Now the two sometime Disciples on their way to Emmaus are at the mimeo and flannel board level of faith. They were keenly aware of what Jesus had been doing. Of course they had made their own judgments and interpretations. To them Jesus was a prophet, as they say, like one of the Old Testament prophets that made such penetrating comments upon God and humanity. To them Jesus was

a social reformer, almost a revolutionary, who would correct all the problems of the day. Prophet and social reformer are not necessarily the same as the Divine Son of God, the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world – that part they had missed.

So, not having really seen Jesus when He was in His earthly ministry, it's not a surprise that they don't see Him on the road to Emmaus. They are neither expecting to see Him, nor are they open to see Him – they are utterly self-absorbed in their own interpretation of what has happened.

It is Jesus who joins them. It's Jesus who initiates the contact. It's Jesus who patiently explains to them all that has happened before, down through the centuries, so that they might grasp what God has done. You might say that they encounter Jesus with their minds' images on a flannel board.

They already know a great deal about Him. When do they come to know Him? It's at the table, isn't it? Jesus has reached out to them on the road; they reach out to Him, asking Him to stay with them, still unaware of just who He is but sensing the wonder of His presence.

At the table the knowledge of Him gives way to the personal encounter with Him as He blesses, breaks, and shares the bread that is His body. Had they seen Him do that just a few days earlier at what we call His "Last Supper?" Had they been present or had they been told that Jesus had proclaimed "This is my Body; whenever two or three gather in my name, I will be with them?" Here He is, present at table.

That's how it is, of course. In the midst of our lives, as we are totally absorbed in planning to do something quite different or caught up in the past, we somehow become aware of a presence, a presence we may have consigned to the mimeo and flannel board phase of life, long put aside. The heart knows Him first, feels the warmth of His presence, and then the mind, the understanding.

In His Holy Name.