

Trinity Church
April 6, 2008

Third Sunday of Easter
RCL, Year A, 3 Easter

A Sermon Preached by The Rev. James C. Ransom

Easter in us, Risen Jesus, Put our hearts to burning with the fire of your Word. Open our eyes to your love in the Breaking of the Bread. Make us instruments of your resurrection. Amen.

The Resurrection story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is, for many Christians, the one resurrection story that they are drawn to; that they can make their own. This is not by chance. In this story, I believe, Luke is trying to show us that the resurrection of Jesus is a timeless event in which we participate. The resurrection of Jesus is not an event about which we say — as Thomas did — “I wish that I could have been there. It must have been magnificent.” Resurrection is to be drawn into something we already know. We not only could have been those disciples on the road to Emmaus, we *are* those disciples! We are on the road to Emmaus, because the Risen Jesus joins us in our worship, opens the Scripture to us. Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus is interpreting to us all the things about himself in the scriptures. And, Jesus presides at our table. Before our eyes, he takes bread, blesses and breaks it, and as he gives the bread to us, our eyes are opened and we recognize him. This is the Body of Christ. Amen. Amen. In Resurrection, Jesus Easter in us, as we become his Body, the people of his Body, the church. The church exists to Easter the world. To draw all people who are on the road to Emmaus into the Risen Christ.

This week we celebrate the 40th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. In his memory the Lorraine Motel has become a museum to the Civil Rights Movement, and a shrine, frozen in time, to his death, his sacrifice. There have been many broadcasts and speeches this week from the balcony of the Lorraine Motel. People who were there in 1968 returning to the spot to relive that day, just as many of us here can remember exactly where we were and what we did when we heard the news of his death. I was in New York City, and went to Central Park to join tens of thousands in prayerful, peaceful, and grief-filled silence. “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

Martin Luther King, Jr. was a man in whom there was an Eastering. The Risen Jesus gathered him into the Scripture, his heart burned as Moses and all the prophets spoke of exodus, freedom, promised land, release of captives, and of the Risen life of Jesus made real to Martin in the breaking of the bread. It was Christ Eastering in him that allowed him to fearlessly and peacefully lead the struggle to break the dark unreality of segregation and lead African-Americans into greater opportunity and equality with others in American society. And even in his death he succeeded. No one says that all issues of racism have been overcome, but everyone says that things are different now. The election of Eugene Sutton as our bishop is only the latest sign to us that things are so different now. So very different. And we give thanks.

Martin Luther King, Jr. is remembered as the inspiration of a movement that ended segregation and freed African-Americans to participate more fully in American society. True enough. But Martin’s real achievement, I believe, his true gift was to those of us who make up America’s white majority. He freed us from the sin of race-based oppression and segregation and imbedded prejudice. He saved *us*. He set us free to live a more just life. We are the ones who are free at last. Our lives are being redeemed, and our children’s lives.

This is a true and remarkable Eastering of the Risen Jesus, gathering us into the truth of the Scripture — enflaming our hearts with loving possibility, drawing us into the broken and Risen Body of our Lord, that makes, time out of time, the Kingdom of God real in the real lives of his saints, and so are we when we embrace the freedom of Christ’s Eastering in us. Make us, Lord, instruments of Resurrection and Life. Amen.