

Third Sunday of Easter

WRITERS' WORKSHOP

Luke 24:13-35

Third Sunday of Easter Analysis by Chris Repp

13Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" 19He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." 25Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then

enter into his glory?" 27Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. 28As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. 30When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" 33That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

DIAGNOSIS: Written Out ("Cut!")

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Resignation*

I write my own scripts, for myself and other people. I create my own reality. I can figure out other people's motives and agendas without having to get to know them. My experience in the world has shown me what people are like, how things work, and what I can reasonably expect from the world and other people.

Jesus' disciples and other hangers-on had also written their own scripts for Jesus. Messiah! King! Son of David! The liberator (redeemer) of Israel! But that script now has to be rewritten. The triumphant king has become the victim of betrayal and power politics. Jesus has not measured up, not managed to play the part they had written for him and he has ruined their happily-

ever-after ending. Oh well. I guess it wasn't meant to be.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Limited Vision, Slow Hearts*

My script, my created reality, prevents me from engaging with the real world, with the actual people I encounter as opposed to the people I imagine them to be. They are mostly not real people to me, just roles in my drama-bit parts of no real significance beyond moving my plot along.

The disciples treat Jesus that way. They do not see Jesus for who he really is because in their minds that cannot possibly be who he is. That guy is dead, killed by the system-a collusion of religious leaders and occupation overlords. His words about fulfilling the prophecies, releasing the captives, opening the eyes of the blind? All had been hollow words, empty promises.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Inevitable Death*

Because of the way I construct my reality, I am bound to treat others as the bit players I have created them to be: idiots in traffic, incompetent sales clerks, rednecks, greedy businessmen, corrupt politicians, sanctimonious pastors, the great unenlightened, unwashed masses. I feel entitled to be short with them, or politely dismissive and superior. I can be kind of a jerk that way. And if that weren't bad enough, I've also got a script for God, and it, too, is a minor part, a supporting role for my hero: me. But the script isn't working. Nobody's following it. I'm at a dead end.

The inability of the disciples to recognize Jesus after the resurrection was connected to their inability to recognize him for who he really was before the resurrection. "You did not recognize the time of your visitation from God," Jesus had exclaimed to Jerusalem as he wept over its imminent destruction (Luke 19:44). Could not the same be said of Jesus' followers?

When he stopped following the script of the conquering hero, he had to be written out. And so he was bound to die. Bound to be handed over to sinners and crucified (24:7). It was inevitable. (Thanks to Fred Danker for this insight into the meaning of “must” [δεῖ] in this and similar texts.) It’s what we do to people like him who won’t take direction. But failing to recognize Jesus has led them also to a dead end, without hope.

PROGNOSIS: Written In (“Action!”)

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Providential Resurrection*

The stranger who encounters the disciples is the risen Christ. He will not be written out of their scripts. His very presence forces them to rethink all their assumptions, not least of which is their assumption about how the world works and who is ultimately in charge.

It turns out that there is an editor for our scripts who will not let us have the last word, a producer who will not let us end the show at intermission. If we were bound to write Jesus out, God was bound to write him back in. Because we had to kill him, God had to raise him from the dead. “Don’t you see, he is the main character! You’ve got no story without him.” The resurrection of Jesus compels another rewrite, a rethinking of the characters’ roles and the focus of my story, which is not my story after all. It’s so much bigger than that. Good writers will tell you that the best stories write themselves.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Open Eyes, Burning Hearts*

Finally able to see Jesus for who he is, the disciples rush back to Jerusalem with a new narrative, and they confer with one another en route. “Did you see what he did with our script? Way better! Kinda gets you right here, doesn’t it?”

The risen Christ opens my eyes to the folly of my constructed reality too, and all the insignificant, self-serving bit parts I've written. The story that is now writing itself has much bigger, more complex and interesting roles for all those folks I mostly ignored. They're each a whole story unto themselves! I start to get to know them, to care for them.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Engagement*

Back in Jerusalem with opened eyes and burning hearts, the disciples proclaim the good news to their friends. "Christ is risen. Alleluia!" "Risen indeed! Ask Simon!" They are the ones now written into the story and they prepare to share it, and themselves, with the world. It's opening night! (I think that's what we should call our Easter evening services, for which this is also the gospel text.)

And I, in my daily life, and in the story that continues to write itself, now begin to find myself more engaged with the world around me; not resigned to the powers that be, but energized by the power of God that has raised Jesus to life and made real to me all of God's creation. I also become a supporting actor in this story-a story that is so much better than I could have written myself. And so do you. Let's compare notes!