

## *An Unfamiliar Refrain*

The second sermon in a series entitled  
From Emmaus to Pentecost

Luke 24.13-16; 28-31 (The Message)

May 22, 2011

The disciples wanted Jesus with them. They wanted him where they could lean on him and follow his lead, and altogether bask in his presence. But he will not stay, that is the truth of it – he will not stay put, stay the same, stay with us. “Stay!” is our chorus, but his refrain is, “Follow!”

- Barbara Brown Taylor (adapted)

That same day two of them were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was. They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on but they pressed him: "Stay and have supper with us. It's nearly evening; the day is done." So he went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared.

I am not a romantic person, but I will always have a soft spot in my heart for *Brigadoon*, one of the classics of the Broadway stage. It was my first musical performance, and the first musical my High School had ever mounted, and these things together made it special. And, man-oh-man, it would be nearly impossible to describe the good times I had with Fiona MacLaran, Meg Brockie, Tommy Albright, and all the characters of that enchanted village. Among those wonderful memories, however, lurks one awkward moment that I'm reluctant to share; but now that I've mentioned it, I'll have to do just that.

I was lucky enough to play the role of Tommy Albright, who was paired in the story with the love of his life, Fiona. You'll never guess who played that role; it was the love of my life (at the time anyway), Connie. I had carried a torch for her as long as I could remember, but she was dating my best friend David, so I swore a solemn oath to him that I wouldn't kiss Connie on stage, but would use a stage kiss that looks like the real thing from a distance, but, believe me, comes nowhere

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close. Things went well throughout our rehearsals; they went well right up until opening night when before an audience of several hundred, Connie planted a big'un smack dab on my kisser! Boy, was I shocked; thrilled, but shocked. I knew my friend would hold me responsible, and I wondered if I would survive his wrath.

Needless to say, I survived. I thought of Brigadoon this week because its story line is similar to that of the Emmaus story. The villagers of Brigadoon lived under an enchantment that insured things would always stay the same. According to the story, in a time of crisis when faith and values were assailed from all sides, a humble pastor prayed to God to protect his village so that it would never be touched by the brokenness of the world. So every night when the villagers retired, Brigadoon vanished into the highland midst, where it remained hidden and protected for the balance of a hundred years. This way, you see, it would never be in any one century long enough to be touched by it. Everything would stay just as it had always been. There are indications in the resurrection stories – including the Emmaus story - that the disciples failed to recognize the risen Lord precisely because they were holding on to the past. They wanted to keep things the way they had been all along. They were looking for their teacher. They were looking for that flesh and blood man they could hold on to, depend on, and look to anytime there was trouble to be resolved, healing to be done, or a mystery to be unraveled. Jesus was their go-to guy, and they wanted him back.

But the one they encountered was changed, transformed, and a mere glimpse of him was enough to convince them that nothing would ever be the same again. They wanted to keep things as they had been ...but this was no longer Jesus, their friend and teacher; rather, this was the resurrected Lord, the one who had conquered death altogether and stood calling them toward that light.

The disciples sang one chorus, as Barbara Brown Taylor has suggested, "Stay, stay, stay." But what came back to them was an unfamiliar refrain, "Follow, follow, follow." That is to say, just as their eyes were opened and they recognized their Lord, he vanished from their sight, as Brigadoon vanished into the highland mist. And they were left with a decision. They could follow their own advice and stay; they could keep things as they had been. Or, they could heed their Lord's refrain, and follow.

The abrupt disappearance of the risen Lord, as we discussed last week, does not indicate that God's presence with us is fleeting and short lived. This story is all about God's presence; thus, we should not doubt God's presence with us, but understand that it is the fullness of God, which can be neither controlled nor fully comprehended, that is present to and with us. We can now add that *we do not dictate the terms of God's presence with us*. God comes to us on God's initiative, God's terms, and it is ours not to dictate what God is like and what God will do in our lives... it is ours simply to respond to that presence.

We want things to stay the same, we want to be comforted, we want to remain unchallenged, we want to be loved without any expectation of return ...and yet the gentle Jesus of our imagination comes to us with all the wildness of the creator God, the unpredictability of glory ...and he will not stay. He is only passing through on his way into the world. And while we plead, stay, stay, he responds, follow. This is our choice. We can try to keep things the way they've always been, but we will not do so in the presence of the risen Lord, because he's ever and always passing through, ever and always moving into the world, ever and always running ahead of us.

If we choose to follow him, we will necessarily play catch up. We will be forced to seek a glimpse of him in the crowds of people on the streets. Perhaps we should look for him in the face of everyone we meet, because we never know for sure where this Jesus may be. What we do know is that Jesus invites us to follow, to let the love he lavishes on us flow through us into the world, to let the healing he offer to us be a source of healing in the lives of others. Do you hear it, that unfamiliar refrain; follow, follow, follow? How, then, will you respond?