

The Gospel today is the account of the two disciples on the road to the village of Emmaus. I think what makes it so powerful is that it is one of those stories in the Bible that we can really enter into and even see ourselves, This morning I want to share another story with you that I believe can help us understand it in a clearer way. It is a very old story called, "The Rabbi's Gift," and maybe some of you have heard it before. It has to do with our faith as individuals and as members of the Christian community. It has to do with how and where we see Jesus in the world, and it has to do with our relationships with each other.

"Once upon a time there was a famous monastery that had fallen on hard times. In the past its many buildings had been filled with young monks, but now was almost deserted. People no longer came there to be nourished by prayer, and only the elderly abbot and a handful of old monks shuffled through the cloisters praising God with heavy hearts and lackluster voices. Now, on the edge of the woods around the monastery an old rabbi had built a little hut. From time to time, he would come there to fast and pray. No one ever spoke to him, but whenever he appeared, the word would be passed from monk to monk, 'The rabbi is in the woods!' And for as long as he was there the monks would somehow feel sustained by his prayerful presence.

On one such day, the abbot decided to visit the rabbi and open his heavy heart to him. So, after the morning Eucharist he set out through the woods. As he approached the hut, he saw the rabbi standing in the doorway as if he had been waiting for the abbot's arrival, his arms outstretched in welcome. They embraced like long-lost brothers, and then entered the hut together where, in the middle of the little room, stood a wooden table with the Holy Scriptures on it.

They sat for a moment in silence in the presence of the Holy Book. Then the rabbi began to weep. The abbot could not contain himself and he covered his face with his hands and began to cry also. For the first time in his life, he cried his heart out. The two men sat there like lost children, filling the little hut with their shared pain and tears. But soon the tears ceased, and all was quiet. The rabbi lifted his head and said, 'You and your brothers are serving God with heavy hearts. You have come to me for a teaching, and I will give you a teaching, but you must only repeat it one time. After that no one must ever say it again.'

The rabbi looked at the abbot and said, 'The Messiah is among you.' For a while all was silent, and then the rabbi said, 'Now you must go.' The abbot left without a word and without ever looking back. The next morning the abbot called his monks together in the chapter room. He told them that he had received a teaching from the rabbi in the woods and that the teaching was never to be spoken aloud again. Then he looked at the group of assembled brothers and said, 'The rabbi said that one of us is the Messiah.'

The monks were startled by this saying, 'what could it mean?' they asked themselves. 'Is Brother John the Messiah? Or Father Matthew? Or Brother Thomas? Am I the Messiah?' What could it mean? They were all deeply puzzled by the rabbi's teaching, but in keeping with his instructions, no one ever mentioned it again.

As time went on, the monks began to treat each other with a new and very special respect and even reverence. A gentle, warm-hearted concern began to grow among them, which was hard to describe, but easy to notice. They began to live with one another as people who had finally found the

special something they had been looking for, yet they prayed and studied the Scriptures together as people who were always looking for something more.

When visitors came to the monastery, they found themselves deeply moved by the life of these monks. Word spread, and before long, people were coming from far and wide to be nourished by the prayer life of the monks and to experience the loving reverence with which they held each other. Soon, young men were asking, once again, to become a part of the community, and the monastery grew and prospered.

In those days, the rabbi no longer walked in the woods. His little hut had fallen into ruins, yet somehow the old monks who had taken his teaching to heart, and had experienced a new joy in their lives, still felt sustained by his wise and prayerful presence."

What I like about the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus and the story of the Rabbi's Gift is that they contain so much basic truth that applies to the Christian community.....like our own St. Mary Magdalene Church for example. The new life and power available to us in the Christian faith does not come from the presence of Christ, but from the *recognized* presence of Christ. How many people walk down the road of their lives from beginning to end, with the Lord beside them, wishing to have him in their lives, but never see him?

On the road to Emmaus the two disciples were discussing all that they had seen and heard about Jesus. They talked about how disappointed they were that Jesus was not the one they had thought he was. They had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel, but alas, he had been condemned to death and crucified like a common criminal. Then they spoke about how amazing it was that they had actually heard that his body was not to be found in the tomb, and that a vision of angels had told some of the disciples that he was alive! Up to this point they had been talking *about* Jesus. While they were walking along, Jesus had fallen in beside them and he began to interpret the Scriptures for them to show that what had happened had, indeed been foretold. As they moved from talking *about* Jesus, to talking *to* him and *with* him, they began to feel the excitement growing within themselves as they listened to what he had to say.

As they came to their destination, they couldn't stand to have this stranger leave them yet. Although they still did not know who he was, his words had ignited a spark within them. They invited him to have dinner with them, and he accepted their offer. Luke tells us, "When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

We are all on the road to Emmaus, you and I. Jesus is with us, but many live as if they were on their own. If we look around, we will see that at the very center of our community life we have the Holy Scriptures. As we gather together as his disciples, we have the Holy Eucharist, his Body and Blood he gave for us, the bread and wine we share. We also have the words of Jesus, that when we love and serve our fellow human beings, we are loving and serving him. So, all of the elements are here, yet they mean nothing if we do not use them as the means by which and through which we recognize the Lord. Even more importantly, you and I are here. In closing, I will share with you a teaching, but you must promise never to say it out loud again. Instead of talking about it, let it become real to you and the basis upon which you live every day of your life. The teaching is this, "The Messiah is among us....." Amen