“I Once Was Blind, But…”
A Sermon Delivered by
Chaplain Margaret E. Siemer
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Back when I was in fifth grade growing up in a small town just south of Springfield, Illinois, a couple of the popular girls in my class got glasses. Peer pressure was already in full swing and I wanted to be popular, too. I wanted glasses because they looked so fashionable. I went home from school one day and told my mom, "I have to sit close to the chalkboard" - yes, those were the old fashioned days - "I have to sit close to the chalkboard so I can see what the teacher is writing." This prompted her to schedule me an appointment with the eye doctor. I was so excited at the thought that maybe I, too, could wear glasses. And of course in my 10 year old mind, wearing glasses automatically made you cool.

So we went to the eye doctor, he did all the tests, and finally put those funky glasses on my face with various lenses attached. It was at that moment that I had an interesting revelation. I could see! With the aid of those funky test glasses, I could see details of things that I had not seen for a while. Coming into the doctor's office that morning, I didn't know that I couldn't see as clearly as I could with assistance.

All I knew is that I wanted to be fashionable and cool, a concept I've been regretting for about 35 years now. Lest you be distracted by the thought that I must tell chaps about PRK or LASIK after the service - been there, done that. Significant improvement. I didn't quite make it to 20/20, but still grateful.

There have been other times throughout my life when I didn't recognize my own blindness, but it usually had more to do with spiritual matters rather than a visual problem. This is where we pick up in our Gospel reading this morning. (Luke 24:13-16)

(Two of Jesus' disciples) were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

Let’s put this in context. Jesus was crucified on the Friday before. These two were walking to Emmaus on what we now know as Easter evening. They were full of doubts and questions. "Why did Jesus have to die? Why was the tomb empty?" They were looking back, reflecting, trying to make sense of the troubling events, and probably more than a little anxious. It's a bit difficult for us to imagine why they couldn't recognize the risen Jesus when he caught up with them on the road. Scripture tells us that "they were kept from recognizing him," but I think they were also blinded by their discouragement. Their disappointment did not allow them to see clearly.

It prompts the question for all of us here today. What blinds us to our risen Lord? What keeps us from seeing God clearly? Is it disappointment, when life's events don't meet our expectations, that clouds our vision? I think there's a threat, particularly in the western world, where as a church culture, we become so familiar with the general storyline of God's redemption through Jesus Christ, that we lose the reverence for his holiness.
I cleaned up my home library this past week and I consolidated all my Bibles. I have 9 Bibles: four different languages- various English translations, Arabic, Hebrew, and German. In communist countries and various areas of the world where the Church has to meet in secret, Christians are literally dying to get just one copy of God's word for an entire congregation. God and his story have become so familiar to us that we often take it for granted.

We get so caught up in life that we're not really sure what God is doing. We've been taught that God is always with us and working in our lives, but were so stressed, confused, distracted or excited that we miss the presence of God. And even when we do become aware of it, it seems like that red dot that flashes on the floor or wall while watch the cat the pounce on it. "I've got it! Oh...where'd it go?"

That's why God calls us to remember. Summarizing Luke 24:25-27, On their walk together, Jesus told the disciples to think back over the experiences of the past days in light of scripture and what they already knew of God. He told them to remember all that God had already told them about the Messiah who was to come, about the nature of his suffering, and about the glory he would one day experience at God's hand. They were to remember the God who turns life's most horrible scars into victory and joy.

When we can't see God, it might be because we are looking down at the dusty road or so busy seeing the dirt on our own sandals that we cannot look up and see the face of Jesus, walking with us, just as God promised. When we look back and remember the way God has worked in our own lives, we can cherish what he has done on our behalf.

When that addiction you had was broken, God worked in your life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

When you had a broken heart that you thought would never heal because your boyfriend or girlfriend broke up with you, or your husband or wife divorced you, or the love of your life died, God was right beside you the whole time, sustaining you. God provided when you lost your job and didn't know how you were going to provide for your family.

When you thought you'd never make it through finals, you did. And you will. God brought healing and peace in the midst of chaos.

When you made a tough, unpopular decision, God stood by you the whole time when everyone else bailed.

When you didn't recognize your own talents, mentors came alongside to encourage and guide you.

When you worried about your next tour, where you'd live, if you'd have any friends, God got there before you did and provided for all your needs.

When you thought you messed up so much that God could never love or accept you, he did...and he does.

That's just a glimpse of what God has done and is doing in our lives. Jesus' words for his disciples today are the same as they were for those disciples on the road to Emmaus. The risen Christ is with us, walking right beside us, talking to us, even during those tough times when we can't recognize his presence. If we take time to recognize what he's done before, we can know that God is fully with us today. And when we recognize that, we will also understand more fully how we should glorify God- even in the midst of our present circumstances.

But wait, there's more! Just like your late night infomercial, there's more! If you act now....
Look back at 24:17-18 Before the disciples recognize him, Jesus asks them what they're talking about. Listen to response of the one named Cleopas, "Are you the only one in all of Jerusalem who has no idea what's going on?"

Can you hear the "really?!" in his words. They know all the details, all the events, even the rumors and they look at Jesus like he's hopelessly naive, but they're blind.

In your interactions with others this week, there will be those who look at you like you are hopelessly naive. They probably know something of Jesus, at least a little, but they're blind. And you were blind, too. I was blind. Sometimes I still am.

But we have an advantage. We have the lenses now through the Holy Spirit that we need to see the risen Christ, to experience his grace and to know in spite of all of life's challenges, we have hope, we have victory and we have a God who loves us for who we are and for who we ever hope to be.

For some, you are the best hope they have in seeing Jesus this week. Help them to see, even when they don’t get it, especially when they don’t get it. They may know something of Jesus, but they're blind. Help them to see so that when they put on the funky glasses called the Holy Spirit, they can say, “I see hope…I see victory…I see Jesus.”

Let us pray. “Holy Father, we admit that we are often blind. Open our eyes so we may see and enjoy your presence. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.