

April 3, 2005  
Luke 24:13-25  
First Parish Church  
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## *Companions on the Journey*

Last week in the Children's message, I told a true story about a physically and mentally challenged boy named Philip. For those of you who weren't here, Philip was in the second grade. When his Sunday school teacher gave each child a plastic (L'Egg) pantyhose egg, she told them to put something that reminded them of Easter in it. The other children put in flowers, caterpillars, and jellybeans. However, when the teacher came to Philip's egg, it was empty. One of the children groaned, "Oh Philip, you didn't do it right." But Philip responded, "I did so do it. The tomb is empty."

That day, Philip, who had for a long time been a stranger to his class, became a companion. It was in the breaking open of the empty pantyhose egg that Philip's spirit was revealed to the rest of the children. Their eyes were opened. They began to welcome him in and in his graciousness he took them in as well.

What a blessing this happened when it did! For, all to suddenly, Philip left them. Just a few months later, Philip died. In spirit, he had always had a good heart; but his physical heart had always been weak and compromised. Suddenly, it just stopped.

His Sunday school class grieved. It was frightening to have one of their own die. They talked about Philip and what they could do to honor him. Then they knew. At his memorial service, his classmates

and his teacher walked right up to the front of the sanctuary and on the communion table they placed a broken open, empty, plastic pantyhose egg.

Being human means we know the heartbreak of grief. When a loved one dies, especially suddenly and unexpectedly, you can feel like you're in a fog. Nothing tastes right. It's hard to listen. Sometimes it's even hard to lift your head and really see what's right in front of your nose. Maybe that's why the two on the road to Emmaus didn't realize, at first, that it was the risen Christ who had become their companion on the journey. They walked with him and they talked with him. They talked about all the things that had happened in Jerusalem. They talked about life and death.

Conversations about life and death have been prominent in our public discourse these last couple of weeks with the situation of the Shiavo family.

They, and we, are confronted with decisions and choices that generations before us couldn't have even imagined. If Terri Shiavo's family had agreed on her medical treatment we never would have heard of them. However, because Terri's companions on her life's journey so vehemently disagreed with one another, and there was no written documentation of her wishes, they took the matter to the public courts, to the politicians and to public sentiment.

Although we can never know all the details and ramifications of this situation, personally, I am able to support the decision of her husband to remove medical intervention in the process of Terri's dying. He did so believing that to be the desire of his wife, and believing that the person he knew was no longer there.

In our own community, the Connors/Marriner family, in these last few weeks, has been dealing with decisions about medical intervention. However, there were a couple of significant differences for them. One, Barbara was fully conscious and able to make the decision herself to end dialysis treatment. Also, Barbara was 90 years old. There was a sense of completeness about her journey. Her parents did not have to watch her die. No parent wants to have their child go before them. It is so difficult to let go. I know too many of you have had this tragedy in your own lives.

These situations are a reminder to all of us that it is crucial to let others know our wishes both verbally and in writing. Therefore, we are in the process of arranging for someone from hospice to come after church on a Sunday in the next few weeks to talk with any of us who wish to learn more about Advance Directives (living wills, power of attorney documents).

The promise of today's gospel is that along with the companionship we have from one another, Christ indeed comes to us – in the midst of our grief, in our pondering and questioning, and is ready to join us at table. We just never know in what form Christ will come.

Today's gospel story was central to the ministry of St. Benedict. At the heart of his monastic order is the practice of hospitality. The sign over Benedictine monasteries says, "When a guest comes, Christ comes." This is a wonderful sentiment as we sit quietly in worship, but imagine having to actually live that way on a day-to-day basis. It can bring many challenging disruptions to the community.

When a younger monk was talking to an older monk about his frustrations with this, the older monk said he had learned over the years to welcome all people equally, whether the person was a prostitute or a prime minister. Then he confessed, "But, sometimes after many visitors have come to the door, and I look down the road and see another stranger approaching the abbey, I say to myself, 'Jesus Christ is that you again?'"

Chances are, it is.

I want to leave us with these words by Gunilla Norris from her book *Becoming Bread*,

***Plenty***

*Having shared our bread,  
we know that we are no longer hungry.  
It is enough that you see me for myself.  
That I see you for yourself.  
That we bless what we see*

*and do not borrow, do not use  
one another. This is how we know  
we are no longer hungry...that*

*the world is full of terror, full of beauty  
and yet we are not afraid to find solace here.  
To be bread for each other. To love.*