

Rev. Gusti Linnea Newquist

“Farm to “Communion” Table”

*Based on Luke 24:13-35. Mourning-to-Hope at the Table*

A few weeks ago, our own Mary Anne Hitt found herself in the role of guest speaker on a college campus, speaking to students about her work in the climate justice movement. Her biggest takeaway from the experience was the profound lack of hope so many of the students conveyed.

They, of course, are the ones who already now and well into the future will experience the worst effects of a climate change that they, themselves, have done little to effect. What kind of life can I have, they wonder. Should I have children? Is there any kind of job worth having that won't continue to wreck the planet?

They are right to ask these questions, as this is indeed the Climate Generation, whose formative years of adulthood parallel the decade we have been told that we who are human MUST get our collective act together to stave off the worst of the climate crisis. Many scholars even argue for the formation of what they call an *eco-spirituality of mourning* to develop rituals of lament that publicly process the dramatic loss of species and communities and life ways we are already enduring.

But Mary Anne, being Mary Anne, refused to allow these students to wallow in despair. *We changed the world!* Mary Anne declared, as she shared with them her decades of day in and day out, in-the-trenches, often painstaking, thankless work as Director of the Sierra Club's “Beyond Coal Campaign.”

Ten years ago we could not get a comprehensive climate bill passed, even with one party rule, Mary Anne told them. This year we did. Ten years ago we did not have the technology on our side or the economics on our side or the broad spectrum of political support on our side. This year we do. We have everything we need to mitigate the worst effects of climate change. We just need to *do* it! And we can!

I am more hopeful than I have ever been, Mary Anne declared to this skeptical crowd of climate doomers. And because they saw her hope - a genuine hope wrought from decades of day in and day out, in the trenches, often painstaking, thankless work - they began to have a glimmer of hope, too.

Maybe we *can* get it done, they began to imagine. It is only 2023. We have six and a half years left to do our part! And even then the real work will only be beginning! This is the work of our lifetimes!

This kind of hope from the trenches to inspire the resurrection of a movement in malaise parallels what we find in the walk to and from Emmaus in our Lesson from Luke this morning. Two dejected disciples of Jesus, despairing in the wake of doom and gloom, traumatized by the cross, making their way back home, perhaps. We are not told why Emmaus is their destination.

Their world, too, seems to be over before it even really began. How can we go on, they wonder to themselves. Why even bother? What's the point in the end?

But Jesus, being Jesus - in resurrected form - refuses to allow these disciples to wallow in despair. He remains unknown to them at first. But then at the table, filled with the fruits of the earth, such as they are in first century Judea, and a blessing and a breaking and a giving - a reminder of where they have been and where they have been intending to go all along - and in an instant they see what they could not see before. *They have already changed the world*, through the ministry of Jesus. They can do it again!

Maybe we *can* get it done, these early disciples of Jesus began to imagine. It is only 33 AD. We have the rest of our lives to do our part! And even then the real work will only be beginning! Whereby the table in Emmaus transforms into a tipping point of hope that turns them right back around, running back to Jerusalem, ready to pick up exactly where they left off with others who have received a similar message of hope.

A ritual of mourning becomes a witness to resurrection. That is what the sacrament of Communion is really all about.

In light of this story of *tipping point hope* in our resurrection narratives and in our communion liturgy, I think it is no mere coincidence that Earth Day takes place smack dab in the middle of the Season of Easter. Easter, which I will keep on saying as many times as you will let me, is a Season and not just a Sunday.

A full fifty days of resurrection celebration leading up to a burst of Spirit energy on Pentecost breaking forth from the heavens to evidence the new thing God is already doing in us and among us, even on the other side of the worst that humanity can do to ourselves and to others, including climate change.

The Season of Easter is about glory over agony, victory over defeat, and a steadfast never-quitting never failing always with us through thick and thin LOVE that will not ever let us go. The Season of Easter is about second chances.

We who are human surely do need a second chance when it comes to this climate we call home. If Mary Anne is right - and God, I pray she is - we really do have that chance right here, right now, in our own Emmaus Walk for the Earth, this Earth Day Sunday and the next six and a half years of the decade, which will then be the foundation for the real work of the rest of our lives.

The renowned indigenous botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer puts it this way in the Epilogue of her beloved book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*:

*I envision people recognizing, she says, for perhaps the first time, the dazzling gifts of the world, seeing them with new eyes, just as they teeter on the cusp of undoing. Maybe just in time. ...*

*Whatever our gift, Robin Wall Kimmerer says, we are called to give it and to dance for the renewal of the world. In return for the privilege of breath.*

With every breath we take, may we be and become that tipping point of hope.