

There is so much that goes wrong in our world. An infant is beaten to death by the mother's boyfriend. Children are killed by a horrific accident on the way to a church camp. A young parent dies of a mysterious illness at the prime of his/her life, leaving the children with no one to care for them. Innocent civilians are slaughtered. Natural disasters destroy thousands and thousands of human lives, homes, and farmlands.

Indeed, our world is filled with darkness.

Jesus' disciples knew this more than anyone we know. They had followed their master for three years. They had lived with him 24/7.

And yet, their teacher was executed on the cross as a political criminal. His last hours were too horrible to behold. He was nailed to the cross and was mocked by the Roman soldiers, ridiculed by the religious leaders, and spat at by the howling crowd.

No wonder the disciples were in total despair. No wonder they lost hope. Their lives were engulfed in total darkness.

But three days later, on the Sabbath, something unthinkable happened. Jesus appeared to a few women. He appeared to several disciples. His tomb was empty.

If you believe that Jesus' appearances could have been videotaped, fine. If you believe that they did not happen that way literally, fine.

The important thing is not the manner in which Jesus appeared. What is crucial is the meaning of Jesus' Resurrection.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John point to the utter amazement of the disciples that Jesus was present with them in a new way. They point to their overwhelming conviction that death was not the last thing. Cruelty, greed, senselessness, and atrocities were not the final things that define life.

The disciples were given the faith that God would provide for us eternal life in which cruelty, senselessness, and atrocities will be completely overcome and the entire world will be transformed.

More concretely, the infant whose life was ended by an act of cruelty is embraced into God's eternal life. The innocent who were killed by bayonets and bombs are embraced into God's eternal life. The young parent whose life was suddenly cut short by a devastating illness is embraced into God's eternal life. The victims of earthquakes and tsunami are embraced into God's eternal life. So none of them lived in vain.

It was this realization that changed the disciples from cowards to brave believers who proclaimed from then on that Jesus is Lord and all other powers, even death, do not shake our foundations.

That was how the disciples met the risen Lord.

Where do we meet the risen Lord today? The episode of the road to Emmaus gives us an important clue.

Two of Jesus' disciples are walking from Jerusalem to the village named Emmaus. They were quite despondent, because their teacher had been executed. It was at this point that a stranger joins them. He is the risen Jesus, but they do not recognize him.

Now it is almost evening. As the three men approach Emmaus, the disciples invite the stranger, "Stay with us, for night is falling." They go to an inn and break bread together. The Gospel of Luke writes, "Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him."

When do we meet the risen Jesus today? We meet him when we ask him to stay with us; when we break bread together with him and others; when we worship together; when we act through compassion and love, when we love our neighbors and become reconcilers in the world of estrangement; when we participate in the processes of justice and peace.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of our Christian hope that nothing, absolutely nothing, even death can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, our Lord. This is the affirmation that braces us for the living of these days.