There's something wistful and nostalgic about today's readings. They casually refer to a whole lot of normal life that we have lost for now. Those joyful baptisms so many churches would have been celebrating this season. The sheer normality of walking with a friend and allowing a stranger to join us. The pleasure in sharing a table at an inn. Most of all perhaps the rich soul-feeding ordinariness of breaking bread together, both in our homes and in our churches. So much loss.

We are not going to stroll into a neighborhood pub and encounter a friendly stranger, let alone Jesus, any day soon. We are not going to break bread together at the dinner table or the altar table any day soon. But we are still going to encounter the Risen Christ in other places and other ways. Not all is loss, not all is lost.

One of these ways of encounter ties Easter and earth day together. Sallie McFague, eco-theologian extraordinaire, called the created world God’s body. She teaches that God is present in every atom of every organism throughout this planet. Not that God is contained by the world but the opposite - the world is contained by God. This world is holy not just because it is God’s creation but because it is God’s dwelling place.

So do not be surprised to encounter the risen Christ as you take your daily walk, or even as you gaze out your window. In anything you see that speaks of new life, new growth and hope, the Risen Christ is present. A child skipping, a flower budding. In anything you see that speaks of continuity, of life that lasts beyond human years, the Risen Christ is present. An old twisted tree, one bright star. In anything you see that speaks of beauty and celebration, the Risen Christ is present. Shared laughter, a glorious sunset. As Gerald Manley Hopkins wrote: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.” Open your eyes to see those flames of divine promise.
But, before we fly too far away on the wings of poetry, we might ask how COVID 19 fits into this worldview? How can this benighted virus be part of the body of God? For it isn’t something sent from outside to punish or teach us, it isn’t divine revenge for our mistreatment of the divine creation. It is somehow part of our embodiment, part of God’s embodiment. An embodiment in which suffering and death are somehow as essential a part of the gift of life as joy and birth, in which even the body of our risen savior bears dreadful scars. Which doesn’t mean we shouldn’t rage against it – like all suffering we should do our human best to bring it to an end. And like all suffering we know it will be unable to defeat the love and life that is present in the risen Christ.

All who suffer are part of God’s body, part that we must give especial care. To paraphrase John Chrysostom, if you don’t see Christ in the unhoused person on the street what is the point of seeing Christ in the chalice? Our broken communion practice, our inability to eat and drink together, only reflects our broken unjust society, our unwillingness to share God’s abundant gifts and see the risen Christ in every human face.

We need to be open to encounter the risen Christ in the other, in the poor and the emotionally needy, in the jogger who runs too close and isn’t wearing a face mask, in our partner who has stacked the dishwasher wrong for the 11hundredth time! It is only then that those moments we spend contemplating the consecrated elements can truly bring us closer both to one another and to the risen Christ. Behold what every human being is when you see that bread and wine, pray to become the love that every human being needs as you gaze upon them.
And also behold who you are in that bread and wine. Our deepest self is the other place where we encounter the Risen Christ. Most simply, most essentially, deep within us. Each one of us is also a creature charged with the grandeur of God, each one of us is part of God’s body. When we feel an impulse to reach out in love, when we are surprised by a moment of joy, when we know the depth of grief and yet continue to breathe, then we are encountering the risen Christ in our own being.

So please, dear God breathed bearers of the Risen Christ, be gentle with yourselves through these hard weeks. Don't beat yourself up for another night watching comfort TV rather than scrubbing the bathroom or learning a new language (Parks and Rec is currently my favorite). Don't work 12 hours a day just because your home is now your office. And if you can't work, don't for a second believe your worth is any less than when you could – your value does not lie in your productivity but in your unique presence in the body of God. The risen Christ lives in you – see and honor your own divine essence along with that of the earth, the Eucharist, and your neighbor.

Those two companions on the road to Emmaus had the luxury of encountering the risen Christ in ways that are closed to us for now. But we are no less in the presence of the Risen Christ than they were – even though like them we may find it hard to recognize at first. Truly look at this world, at your neighbor, at yourself and see the presence of the risen Christ in each one. Gaze at Christ in this sacrament of the altar and also gaze at Christ in the sacrament of creation and of humanity – yours included. There, hidden in the everyday encounters of our restricted lives, is the God who broke through death to be with us and to love us for always and forever. Amen.