

April 7, 2024
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Luke 24:13-35
Joined on the Journey

Throughout Lent we explored stories in the gospel of Luke about Jesus and food-feeding the 5000, eating on the sabbath, eating with sinners, eating with church leaders, eating with friends before he died. Each time, Jesus' challenges the status quo, the easy route, and demonstrates the radical hospitality he calls us to.

Our passage this morning follows a similar theme and falls directly on the heels of last week's resurrection story. It is, in fact, the same day. Jesus has been crucified, died, and has been buried. And now, the tomb is empty. The women have been told that Jesus is risen - and Peter has gone to see the empty tomb for himself.

This passage finds two disciples walking away from Jerusalem and all that has happened. It is a text in motion. And so I invite you to get up and walk with the story. You are welcome to come up and follow the disciples during the reading, or to walk the sanctuary or fellowship hall - and to do so even during the sermon. If you are watching from home, you are invited to walk with us, remembering that we are connected through the earth to one another. You are also invited to make the journey as you sit using the labyrinth printed in the bulletin. You can trace it with your finger, or grab a nearby pencil or pen to draw the path.

Imagine you are one of the disciples traveling the road away from Jerusalem.

Come, listen, and join in the word of God from Luke 24:13-35 in the Common English Bible translation.

Narrator: On that same day, two disciples were traveling to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking to each other about everything that had happened. While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey. They were prevented from recognizing him. He said to them,

Jesus: "What are you talking about as you walk along?"

Narrator: They stopped, their faces downcast. The one named Cleopas replied,

Cleopas: "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who is unaware of the things that have taken place there over the last few days?"

Narrator: He said to them,

Jesus: “What things?”

Narrator: They said to him,

Disciple: “The things about Jesus of Nazareth. Because of his powerful deeds and words, he was recognized by God and all the people as a prophet. But our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel. All these things happened three days ago.

Cleopas: But there’s more: Some women from our group have left us stunned. They went to the tomb early this morning and didn’t find his body. They came to us saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who told them he is alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women said. They didn’t see him.”

Narrator: Then Jesus said to them,

Jesus: “You foolish people! Your dull minds keep you from believing all that the prophets talked about. Wasn’t it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

Narrator: Then he interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets. When they came to Emmaus, he acted as if he was going on ahead. But they urged him, saying,

Cleopas: “Stay with us. It’s nearly evening, and the day is almost over.”

Narrator: So he went in to stay with them. After he took his seat at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. They said to each other,

Disciple: “Weren’t our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?”

Narrator: They got up right then and returned to Jerusalem. They found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were

saying to each other, “The Lord really has risen! He appeared to Simon!” Then the two disciples described what had happened along the road and how Jesus was made known to them as he broke the bread.

Narrator: This is the word of the Lord.

I wonder where you might find yourself in this resurrection story. Would you have stayed in Jerusalem? Did you stay with the disciples? Maybe you went to be with your family, or maybe you went to be somewhere alone.

I went for a walk. I went for a walk because I was totally overwhelmed. I went for a walk because I needed fresh air. I went for a walk because I had to move. I went for a walk because I needed away from all the people and their talking - and their silence - and their wide range of feelings. I went for a walk because nothing makes sense. I went for a walk because I just had to get out of there - because our hopes that Jesus would redeem Israel had been dashed. There was nothing more to do.

And Cleopas came with me. We walked in a mix of silence and conversation - comfortable in each other's presence, even if not in the circumstances around us. We talked about the hopes we had . . . before.

We talked about how we met Jesus, what that first experience was like. How he drew us in with a spirit that seemed to envelope everyone around him. He seemed always to be beckoning people toward him - and toward his way to God. A way that fed people, even when it seemed impossible. His way healed people in body and in spirit. His way was like no other. He ate with tax collectors, challenged our religious leaders, and knew us.

He talked to and touched people he wasn't supposed to - and we surely didn't want to. He welcomed children to him when we shooed them away. He baffled us with parables - which sometimes we understood, sometimes we liked, and lots of times made us uncomfortable with their messages of love for neighbors and enemies, of abandoning what seems like common sense to care for the poor, of practicing forgiveness and the call to be part of this radical hospitality Jesus offered.

We shared these things as we walked, stopping now and again. Oh, I imagine you wonder where it was that we were going. We were headed for Emmaus. Its location

isn't really known, though some have speculated possibilities. I'm not at all sure it matters where we were headed, just so long as it was away. Author and Theologian Frederick Buechner describes it this way:

“[Emmaus] It was no place in particular really, and the only reason that they went there was that it was some seven miles distant from a situation that had become unbearable...Emmaus is the place where we go in order to escape – a bar, a movie, wherever it is we throw up our hands and say, ‘Let the whole damned thing go hang. It makes no difference anyway. . . It is where we go, where these two went, to try to forget about Jesus and the great failure of his life.’”¹

That about sums it up. I wonder if you know something of this – and I wonder where or what Emmaus is for you. Where is it you go when you feel like life and God and the church have let you down? Where is it you go when what you had hoped for – relationship, family, health, job, even the church – doesn't look the way you thought it would.

Anyway, as we are walking along, a stranger joins us who has NO IDEA what is going on. How is that even possible? We told him all that had happened, how our hopes that Jesus would redeem Israel were not realized. He scolded us and then proceeded to interpret scripture – like all of it – all of the prophets from Moses onward. We should have recognized him then – but we didn't. Please don't judge us too harshly – you have the advantage of knowing the whole story at once. I suspect that you, too, have missed Jesus in your midst.

It happened that as he was finishing telling us about the scriptures, we reached Emmaus. And so, we invited him to stay and eat with us. We could easily have let him go on his way – but our sense of hospitality would not let us do so. He agreed and joined us for dinner, sitting down at the table with us.

I must admit, I was more confused than when we left. Not only have I been reflecting on all that happened, I'm curious about this stranger's interpretation. Something was stirring in me . . . I glanced at Cleopas across the table, a quizzical eyebrow raised.

¹ Frederick Buechner, *The Magnificent Defeat*, 84-85.

And then, the most amazing thing happened. The stranger picked up the bread, blessed it and broke it and gave it to us. Have you ever had one of those moments where suddenly everything made sense? Where you might say a lightbulb went off in your head? (I of course have no idea what a lightbulb is). Or maybe you've had an experience of going back to a memory that suddenly made the present more poignant. That was this moment. This stranger, this one we didn't recognize, it was Jesus!! What the women said was true, what Peter saw - or rather didn't see - was also true! Jesus really was alive again - and showed himself in the breaking of the bread, that common meal we always had together. A simple and powerful act.

Episcopal Priest Cynthia Bourgeault thinks that we could not recognize Jesus as we were walking because we were stuck in "self-pity and nostalgia" and that it took Jesus walking us through the scriptures yet again, and breaking bread with us yet again, for us to realize he was there with us.² I do think we were stuck in the phrase "We had hoped" - I imagine you know something of this - wishing things were different, longing for the way they used to be before . . . stuck in a place that can't imagine a different way.

And then . . . he disappeared. Just like that. We have no idea where he went - or even how. For the millionth time that day, Cleopas and I looked at each other in awe and disbelief. The risen Christ fed us, nourished us, with more than mere bread. He reminded us that we are loved - even when we try to escape what is hard in the world, even when we feel that hope is lost, when our faith falters, Christ is with us - in body and in Spirit. He met us in our anguish just as he met Judas who betrayed him, and Peter who denied him. Just as he meets you, whether you recognize him at first or not. We realized then that our hopes were misplaced. We were stuck in our own, and very human, ideas of what the Messiah should be and do. Jesus met us in our stuckness and through his presence and his spirit, we realized the work was just beginning.

And again we knew that we would never be the same, that the world would never be the same. That we had to go back - back to Jerusalem, back to the place of anguish - and of joy - back to the community we left. Back to figure out just what we are to do now - how we are to share the good news and live out Jesus'

² Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus*, 130-131.

teaching in the world. Even though it was late, and the road would be less safe, we hurried back to Jerusalem .

I've heard that in your time, everyone is breathing a sigh of relief that Lent and Holy Week - and even Easter are over and things can go back to "normal". I assure you - and challenge you - from where I stand, nothing again will be normal. Nothing will be over with Christ. The hopes we had had have become new hopes - new hopes in Christ with the assurance that he is risen. There is noew hope. There is new life. There is new work - and it is all to be celebrated and shared.

I give thanks that God met us on the road that day, that Jesus matched our steps and carried us along with his presence and his Word. Even though I still walk to Emmaus sometimes, I remember every time I'm at the table that all that I hoped for in Jesus is still alive and at work in the world - through you, and through me, through Jesus whom we sometimes don't recognize, and still encounters us along the way.

Amen.