

## *Sermon Luke 24: 13-35 The Road to Emmaus*

That same day two of the disciples were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who He was. He asked, "What's this you're discussing so intently as you walk along?" They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend. Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said, "Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn't heard what's happened during the last few days?" He said, "What has happened?" They said, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word, blessed by both God and all the people. Then our high priests and leaders betrayed Him, got Him sentenced to death, and crucified Him. And we had our hopes up that He was the One, the One about to deliver Israel. And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn't find His body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn't see Jesus." Then Jesus said to them, "So thick-headed! So slow-hearted! Why can't you simply believe all that the prophets said? Don't you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?" Then He started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to Him. They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. Jesus acted as if He were going on but they pressed Him: "Stay and have supper with us. It's nearly evening; the day is done." So He went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, He blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized Him. And then He disappeared. Back and forth they talked. "Didn't we feel on fire as He conversed with us on the road, as He opened up the Scriptures for us?" They didn't waste a minute. They were up and on their way back to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and their friends gathered together, talking away: "It's really happened! The Master has been raised up - Simon saw Him!" Then the two went over everything that happened on the road and how they recognized Jesus when He broke the bread.

Again this week I hope you'll get a pen to make some notes in your worship program. You might look at what you've brought with you since the pens in the pews might not be top-quality writing utensils.

Yesterday the bike riders from the Chinese Community United Methodist in Oakland were here for a snack-and-water break. This was the 50-mile bike ride to raise

money to help support the Kumi School in Africa. Zelda and I were here visiting with them, and as they left, I said, "I'm going back to work, to write a sermon." One of the riders asked if I was preaching from the lectionary, which is the Road to Emmaus, and I said yes. He said, "If we'd been on the road to Emmaus and seen Jesus, we'd all live differently... there's no way it wouldn't have changed us." It struck me that to be a Christian is to walk on the road to Emmaus. We walk this life, hoping to travel with others who love Jesus; sharing our stories about where we've seen Him, and where we've not seen Him; and we pray (and maybe hope-against-hope) that He'll show up and walk with us. More than any other gospel story, the Road to Emmaus is the story of the Christian life.

This story takes place, Luke tells us, "on that same day." That same day was the third day after Jesus was laid in the tomb, when the women went to anoint His body, and were told by the angels, "He is not here, He is risen from the dead." The women had gone to tell the others, but Luke tells us, "These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." So if it doesn't feel like Easter to you (if you, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, feel bereft, hopeless, alone, and afraid... and like yesterday's bike rider would live a totally different life if only you'd seen Jesus, risen from the dead) If it doesn't seem like Easter to you... it's because Easter is a process, a season, not just a single Sunday of triumph and trumpets and chocolate-covered "Peeps". If it doesn't seem like Easter to you, then the Road to Emmaus is your story. If it doesn't feel like Easter to you, stick around, because as Jesus might have said (actually it was baseball legend Yogi Berra who said) "It ain't over till it's over."

On that same day, Luke tells us, two of the disciples walked the road to Emmaus, talking with each other about all that had happened in just a few days: Jesus had shared the Passover meal with them, and had broken bread and given it to them as a sign of His broken body. He'd shared a cup of wine with them, a sign of His blood of a new Covenant, spilled for the forgiveness of sin. After dinner, they had gone with Him to the Mt. of Olives to pray, where Jesus was betrayed by Judas, and was arrested. It must have seemed like a fast-forward nightmare: Jesus was quickly found guilty, stripped of His clothes and given a mock-crown of thorns, and forced to carry His cross to Golgotha, where He was hanged on it until He died. The disciples went into hiding after that, terrified for their lives, terrified that another Roman shoe was about to drop on them.

On that same day - when the women had come running from the empty tomb - the disciples walked the road to Emmaus. Because "it was that same day" we know they weren't skipping the road, singing, and praising God. They probably had trouble putting one foot in front of the other. If they talked, it was to ask how things went so terribly wrong, and to ask what they would do now... what Jesus' friends would do now that He was gone. A stranger joined them on the road. He asked them why they were grieved, and they were amazed that there was anyone in Jerusalem who didn't know that Jesus, the Master, had been crucified. They poured out the story to Him, alone with their heartache and disappointment. This is the oddly funny part of the story, that the stranger, instead of being sympathetic, berated them. "So thick-headed! So slow-hearted! Why can't you simply believe all that the prophets said? Don't you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his

glory?" Then [the stranger] started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to... Jesus, Himself.

When you walk on the Road to Emmaus with the Risen Christ, He's impatient for you to recognize... that whether or not it feels like it to you, that Easter has happened. Christ has risen, and no heartache or disappointment or fear... not even the grave... can keep Him - His love and Presence - from you. "If only we'd been on the Road to Emmaus, we'd live differently... if we'd seen the Risen Christ." Every step you and I take is an opportunity to walk with the Risen Christ, to see Him, to experience His love and Presence. But we are, or just speaking for myself, "thick-headed and slow-hearted" to recognize Him... to live as if it's Easter.

Luke tells us that as the disciples neared Emmaus, the stranger continued to walk on, but they invited Him to stay with them, and to share a meal with them. And in the breaking of the bread - in the radical act of hospitality of inviting a stranger to eat at their table - Jesus appeared to them, as He took bread, blessed it, and broke it. When we gather at this Table, to eat the bread and drink the cup, we come at Jesus' invitation to share His body, and His blood, and His life... to walk with Him. He invites us in, not as strangers, but as friends. In this strange political climate we live in ~ these days of hostility and suspicion of "the other"; when many of us feel the need to put up "Everyone is welcome" signs; and people different from the dominant culture, people of color or other religions or sexual orientations feel less than welcome... feel threatened... this is an opportunity for us to walk the Road to Emmaus with them... to practice radical acts of hospitality... to invite them in... and to recognize Jesus.

Over a hundred years ago, author and theologian G.K. Chesterson (he wrote the Father Brown mysteries that are currently on the Acorn channel) said, “Christianity has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.” I think among other things Chesterson was saying that we’d like to see Jesus where we’d like to see Him... perhaps in our own homes, with our own friends, in expected places... nice places, like gardens and sanctuaries. Take a minute and look at that first question on page 3 of your worship program. It says, “Where do I expect to see Jesus?” Jot down a word or two or three... where do you expect to see, to encounter, and experience, Jesus? [wait]

Part of the grief of the two on the Road to Emmaus was, as they said, “We had our hopes up that He was the One, the One about to deliver us.” That’s the cry of the disciple, of you and me, walking the Road to Emmaus. We have our hopes up that Jesus would rescue us from pain and grief... we hope that He would kick the butts of our enemies... that He would deliver us from how hard, how excruciatingly hard, this human life is! How thick-headed and slow-hearted we can be to see that Jesus walks with us, and shares this human life, and sanctifies it... that is, He makes it holy, because He has lived it. At any given moment we have the opportunity to see (to have our eyes opened) that as we walk the Road to Emmaus, we walk with Jesus, and in acts of hospitality, He is revealed.

In a pastoral care class in seminary, we were taught that to offer tissue to someone crying is to say to them either, “You should be done (with this)” or “I’m not comfortable with you crying.” I actually can’t sit with someone who’s crying, whose nose is running or whose mascara is running down their face, and not give them tissue. I

never find places of grief and pain, death-beds, or people with broken hearts to be comfortable. I never think, Oh, good, I get to go be with someone who's agony is so big there might not be room for me there, too. But I do often see Jesus there. Sometimes the act of hospitality is presence... it's being there. The second question on page 3 of the worship program is, "Where do I not expect to see Jesus?" Take a moment and remember or imagine uncomfortable places, or times, where you haven't or you don't expect to see Jesus. [wait]

The Christian life is the Road to Emmaus, walking together, walking with Jesus. It's tempting to walk with others who are like-minded. Bible scholars think that the disciple walking with Cleopas was his wife, Mary, who is mentioned in John's gospel... Cleopas and Mary were walking together, grieving and talking together. One of my favorite hymns is "Come Thou, Fount of Every Blessing" and one of the lines in it is, "Jesus sought me when a stranger, running from the fold of God." We were once strangers to God, but have been invited in, in a radical act of God's hospitality, to be friends and followers of Jesus Christ. What if no one had ever invited us to know about Jesus and His love? Cleopas and Mary told the stranger on the Road to Emmaus all about Jesus, and even their dashed hopes, and their crushing disappointment. In walking with another person, sharing this human journey, especially with someone who is a stranger to the love of God... Jesus can be revealed. Not so much in what we say, but what we do, and how we act, can Jesus be revealed to a stranger. The third question on page 3 is "Who am I walking with?" Take a moment and think about who you might walk with, and talk about faith with. Think outside the box of friends and

family... think about someone who is lonely or heartsick or is “other” who needs a companion on the road. [wait]

My beloved friend and parishioner, Skip Hanna, died this month. Some of my favorite moments in ministry happened with Skip, who gave me his barn and his horse trough for Pentecost Sunday worship and baptisms. When our families shared meals together, Skip would always defer offering the blessing to me: “We’ll have the ‘professional’ say grace.” Skip himself was full of grace, and I saw Jesus in him, even though he saw me as the ‘professional’ who would speak to Jesus on his behalf. On the Road to Emmaus there is always someone who is looking for Jesus in you. There is always someone hungry for kindness and for a word of hope. There is always someone longing to be invited in. Open our eyes, Lord, not just to You, but to those who are looking for You... looking for Jesus in us. The last question in the worship program is, “Who might be looking for Jesus in me?” Take a moment to prayerfully imagine who is looking for love, for hospitality, for companionship, for acceptance... for Jesus... in you. [wait]

Easter has happened, and is still happening, as we walk the Road to Emmaus with the stranger, as we practice radical hospitality, and recognize the Risen Christ is with us still. The disciples said to each other (this is from the New Revised Standard Version of the bible) “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Thousands of years later John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, would confess that knowing Jesus, not just knowing about Him but experiencing His love and grace – made Wesley’s orderly British heart “strangely warmed.” Yesterday’s bike rider was right-on: it would be different, and easier

to believe - a game-changer for us Christians - if we'd been on the Road to Emmaus and seen the Risen Christ walking with us. But when we experience and express the love of Jesus ~ our hearts can still burn within us with love... that longs to be expressed to the stranger on the Road to Emmaus.

Let's sing our Prayer Song, "Open Our Eyes." Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus, to reach out and touch Him, and say that we love Him. Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen. Open our eyes, Lord... we want to see Jesus.

Amen.