

First Presbyterian Church, Cottonwood Falls, KS 66845
On the Road with Jesus: Luke 24:13-35
Rev. Pat Ireland, Pastor
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SCRIPTURE: Luke 24:13-35

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"

They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹He asked them, "What things?"

They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴*Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.*"

²⁵Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!" ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰When he was at the table with them, *he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.* ³¹*Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.* ³²They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Luke had at least three good reasons for including this incident in his Gospel.

1. Jesus' death and resurrection fit God's purpose as revealed in scripture.
2. The risen Christ is present and experienced in the breaking of bread.
- 3: It is a reminder that the Risen Lord is also absent from the disciples even as he is with us always!

It is no wonder it has been told and retold so often by the community of faith that it has become a model for all our own encounters with Jesus.

Let us Pray: Holy Spirit of the Risen Lord, guide the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts that we might be discover you a companion along our way.

Put yourself into eternal time. Fall into the story.

You and your friend, your spouse, your partner, have followed Jesus to the Passover... in Jerusalem. It was a holy trip, a trip of expectation and hope. As you approached the city, glimpsing for the first time the Temple Mount brilliant in the rising sun, you realize what you are looking at: Jerusalem where the power of faith meets the power of Rome; Jerusalem where the force of the foreign occupation was concentrated and ever visible; Jerusalem, where the power of the ancient celebration of freedom was re-enacted every year. It was as if all the power of both worlds had converged on this one place and time. You and Cleopas were ready for the victory of freedom over oppression ... Oh, the dreams you shared as you entered the city.

And then the others in the crowd begin to sense the excitement. They begin to pick up on the possibilities of the moment. They too are drawn into the Spirit of the place and everybody is singing the traditional chorus of approach to the temple. "Hosanna! Lord, save us now! Hosanna, make us prosper now! Blessed be he that comes in the name of the Lord!" (Ps 118, 25-26) and as you chant the ancient hymn it becomes so real for the moment that you fall into the story. "The Lord is God, and has given us light! Order the processional with boughs right up to the altar." (118:27) And everybody waves branches and throws them before Jesus as he rides that donkey clear up to the gates of the temple. ...

You had so hoped that this was the moment of freedom!

But then, it was as if all hell broke loose. Things just went from bad to worse. The massive public demonstration disintegrated as folks went to join family and friends. Jesus himself, seemed, not energized, but pensive. His friends were increasing fearful of the backlash.

A few days later, the word came, "They have arrested Jesus!" We talked and argued among ourselves whether this was the end or whether Jesus would pull off a miracle. Would he call down God's heavenly host to destroy the foreign occupation or rot in jail like his cousin John? Our emotions swung from one extreme to another.

Then we heard the sentence. Crucifixion. Our hearts sank. Our world fell apart. We followed, at a distance as the Romans paraded him up hill, not the hill of Zion, but of Golgotha. We watched as long as we could, but our hearts were broken, our dreams dashed.

We heard him cry out the ancient hymn of despair that echoed in our own hearts. "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps 22:1) We wandered away in disillusionment. How could this be happening?

We were just numb. We spent the Sabbath with the others, in hiding, from the world and from our own despair. As we prepared to head home early on that first day, the women ran in hysterically claiming that Jesus was alive. They loved him so much they couldn't face the truth. A couple of the guys dashed off – I don't know what they expected, but all they found was an empty tomb.

It seemed to add insult to injury. What kind of person would steal a body?!

We'd had enough. We left for Emmaus.

It felt like a lifetime since we'd been home, we were eager to put behind us the dreams and the disillusionment of Jerusalem. We talked a little on the road, mostly the repeated, 'Why' and 'What now?'

You'd think that we would have heard him approaching. I guess we were just too wrapped up in our grief and disillusionment to notice. It just seemed like he was with us all of a sudden and he asked us what was wrong.

In a rush of pent up anger and frustration and pain it all poured out.

I don't know where you've been fellow! How can you not know what's wrong. We are in a war we can't win! We're trying to destroy evil and terror with the terror of smart bombs and occupation armies! Our economy is rotten, our taxes are high, our schools are full of tension and disillusionment and nobody knows who to trust. We live on a land better suited for cattle than people with too few jobs and too many "outsiders" whose objective is to exploit our resources, rather than protect them. Our children have moved away and we are not getting any younger! Everybody is getting old and frail and way too many have cancer. Too many have already died! ...

And you ask what's wrong!?!

We had so hoped the Jesus would make a difference but... nothing has changed, death always wins and we're going home.

He looked straight at us, shook his head a little, muttered something about foolish and slow to believe, and ignoring my outburst began to tell us the ancient story.

It was like this in the beginning- all mess and chaos, he said. Then the Eternal Spirit hovered over the mess and began to sort it out. Light here, darkness over there. Water there, land here, sky up there. Plants, animals, mountains, hills, fields and river bottoms all in their own place. The Eternal Spirit worked and worked until it was all good – finished. And then the reward – the creator leaned back and rested... and smiled.

Yea, yea I muttered to myself – it didn't stay good for long!

But he was not put off. The stranger kept spinning his tale. Once upon a time the Eternal Spirit got so upset with the violence and that it was all washed away in an attempt to provide a clean slate. That didn't work.

One upon another time the Eternal Spirit called a people. They followed for many years, but went looking for food and got lost in Egypt where they became slaves. They cried out to God, who sent a great prophet with signs and wonders who parted the waters and led them to freedom.

And deep in my heart, I muttered, I had hoped Jesus would be just like that!

But this stranger just kept on talking. Those people were given the law. It was a gift from the God of creation, given in fire and smoke. It told them how to live in a community of peace and justice.

It was all based on trust and obedience – you 'd think that would be simple but it was too hard! They wandered in the wilderness, they were drawn to other Gods, they wanted to be like their neighbors. They wanted a king. Samuel tried to tell them that Kings weren't the answer, but they insisted, so God gave them the king they asked for.

That worked for a 100 years or so, but ultimately power corrupts and the nation fell apart. Oh it wasn't as if God didn't try to help them. God sent prophets. They were ignored, scorned... or worse.

I remember that prophet Micah railing at them: "What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God." (6:8) They seemed unable to change.

Isaiah suggested there was another way to live, as a servant, responding to power with love and non-violence. They forgot.

The powers of the world carried them off into exile.

They returned a generation or so later, rebuilt the temple, but not their hearts. They fought for power among themselves.

Finally, Rome declared *itself* in control and promised peace – but not freedom.

The priests served ritual, preserving their own position rather than helping the people; and God cried.

Even as they sang them, nobody took seriously the ancient songs: Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord, Those who have clean hands and a pure heart. (Ps 24:2) They washed their hands, but their hearts were untouched. They sought the King of Glory rather than become a servant.

It was happening right in their midst, and they didn't see it!

The stranger became animated as he talked. "The stone the builders rejected is become the chief corner-stone." He said, and "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord."

We knew the lies, but had thought they were just words but now we began to sense something inexplicable stirring in our hearts.

But it had been a long day; an exhausting week and we were almost home. Still, we hated to let go of him, tired as we were. Besides, hospitality demands that we offer a meal, a place for the night - so we offered. As expected, he politely decline, but we offered again, assuring him it was no imposition, and he accepted.

We didn't have much. We'd brought some bread back from Jerusalem. We found some cheese and little wine but as we placed it on the table, the stranger leaned forward and took control of the moment. Rather than defer for us, *HE* lifted the bread to heaven and gave thanks for it, using the ancient liturgical words. "Blessed art thou O God, King of the Universe - Giver of Bread"

And as he broke that loaf and offered it to us, we knew! We had seen this before, when he fed the crowd on the hillside - oh, that was a glorious day! We'd seen it when we were on the road together, whenever we all gathered to share a meal. *And* we'd seen it on the night of his betrayal. We knew! It was Jesus! We felt him, not like a ghost, but like a moment from eternity – timeless and more real than real.

All too soon, the moment was past. He was gone, but we *knew* he'd been there with us that whole long discouraging day. We *knew* and we were so filled with such joy and eternity that we just couldn't keep it to ourselves. We turned around to Jerusalem to tell the others!

Post Script:

Kevin

1: I felt such a fool!

1: "Have you been hiding somewhere?"

1: How could we not have known?

1: Until the bread was broken!

1: Then all of heaven's light reflected in those eyes.

1: And we stared.

1: In awe.

1: Comforted.

1: Reassured.

1: Loved.

Pat

2: You may have felt a fool. I looked a fool!

All that talking we did with him. All that "Are you the only one not to have heard?"

2: "Do you know nothing of what happened?"

2: I can't believe we didn't recognize him!

2: Yes, until he broke the bread.

2: And his voice echoed round us as if we were sitting amidst heaven's mountains.

2: Silenced.

2: Shocked.

2: Amazed.

2: Astonished.

2: Yes, loved.

1. Knowing we were the ones who were foolish and slow of heart. (v25)

2. I'm so glad he didn't give up on us!

1: I still felt a fool.

2: And I know I looked a fool.

1: It wasn't be the first time.

2. Nor the last!

In Agreement: Let's go tell the others!

Affirmation of Faith.

This is the Day the Lord has Made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 118:24