

“The Walk to Emmaus”

The gospel writer Luke relates a story connected to Easter that the other gospel writers do not include. Let’s look at that story. (Turn to Luke, chapter 24).

Luke has already described how some of the women who followed Jesus came to the tomb early Sunday morning, found the entrance boulder rolled away, and Jesus not in there! And how two angels there say, “He’s not here; he is risen!” Then Luke continues: “Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened” (Luke 24:13-14).

Two travelers walk the dusty road westward from Jerusalem toward a village called Emmaus, a distance of 7 miles. It’s Sunday, late afternoon, the same day the empty tomb was discovered. One of them is named Cleopas. The name of the other person is not given. They’re talking about what has happened the last few days.

What happened? Oh, not much! Just that the man they thought would redeem Israel – their rabbi/teacher - was arrested, hastily and illegally tried, and then executed by crucifixion – the whole thing a mockery of justice. And now some other followers of Jesus were saying that they went to the tomb this morning, and found the body of Jesus gone! (Not really much to talk about, huh!).

Luke continues: “While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them” (verse 15). Jesus Himself, now risen from the dead, approaches them and joins them, “but their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (verse 16). They did not recognize Him. It says, “Their eyes *were kept* from recognizing him.” This raises some questions I’m not sure we can answer. Why didn’t they recognize Jesus? Did He look a lot different? Did God the Father deliberately keep these 2 men from recognizing Him? If so, why?

“And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad” (verse 17). “What are you talking about?” Jesus asks. This question stops them in their tracks. They stand there, silent, looking sad. It’s not hard to imagine why they must have felt sad, and confused, with all that’s happened the last 3 days.

The story continues: “Then 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?’” (verse 18). C’mon man, Cleopas says. Are you the only one around here who’s totally oblivious to all that’s happened these last few days!

Jesus plays along with them, and asks: “What things?” Then they spill out their story. “He 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, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But 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. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and 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. 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” (verses 19-24).

How does Jesus respond to this? “Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (verses 25-27). He kind of chides them for their unbelief. Pretty much across the board, the initial response of all His followers right after His resurrection was that they didn’t believe it had happened! Then He connects what happened with what was in the Old Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures) – how all of this is a fulfillment of what was prophesied. That the Messiah should suffer, and then enter into God’s glory.

So, after a while Jesus starts to walk ahead of them, as if He’s going to move on. They strongly urge Him to stay with them and lodge for the night. He agrees. They’re sitting down for a meal, and as He breaks bread, all of a sudden they recognize who He is! And – poof! He vanishes.

Stunned, they say, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32).

Wow! There is *so much* packed into this narrative! Let’s examine some of the truths found there – in no particular order!

Our Old Testament – the Hebrew Scriptures – point to the coming of Jesus as the Messiah. It’s easy to write off, to pretty much dismiss, the Old Testament. “Oh, that’s just a bunch of laws.” No it isn’t! “The Old Testament paints a totally different picture of God.” No it doesn’t! The Old Testament prepares the way for the coming of Jesus. I’ve put together a study I’ve done a number of times, basically pointing out that we can only have a very incomplete understanding of Jesus and His message if we don’t understand the Old Testament.

So many prophecies about the Messiah are fulfilled in Jesus. For instance, Isaiah chapter 11 speaks about a kingdom of peace and righteousness, led by one sent from God who is filled with God’s Spirit, someone who is a descendant of Jesse, King David’s father.

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him - the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord - and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth” (Isaiah 11:1-4a). Indeed, Jesus *was* from the house and lineage of David. That’s why Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem when Jesus was born, because they had to register for a census.

And Jesus’ birthplace. Micah 5:2 says, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small

among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

And prophecies of a Messiah who would be a humble servant, a “suffering Savior” - prophecies mostly overlooked, but prophecies Jesus fulfilled. The majestic words of Isaiah 53: “He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:3-5). Does that not paint a picture of Jesus and Good Friday!

This is just *a couple* of examples. Google “Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by Jesus” and you will come up with a long list of prophecies Jesus fulfilled.

Jesus, walking with the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus, “interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (“All the scriptures” would be the Old Testament writings).

Notice too: Understanding the Scriptures warmed their hearts and energized their lives spiritually. “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). The Scriptures have a way of setting us on fire for the Lord.

One of the problems of the Church today is not that congregations are filled with really bad people. It’s that many in the church are good and decent people who lack that passion for Christ and the work of His kingdom. Do you have a burning heart for Jesus?

It was May 24th, 1738. An Anglican priest and scholar by the name of John Wesley was struggling to find peace with God, an assurance that Christ had saved him. One night he reluctantly went to a small group Bible study, where a group of seekers were studying Paul’s epistle to the Romans. That night, and that encounter with Scripture, changed John Wesley’s life. His description of that event is classic: “In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading (Martin) Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

When’s the last time you or I have experienced God in such a way that our heart was “strangely warmed” – that you felt a new sense of the presence of God, a new passion to serve Christ and do His will above all else in life?

There is a program in the United Methodist Church called “Walk to Emmaus.” It’s a 3-day spiritual renewal retreat, adapted from a Roman Catholic experience known as the “Cursillo Movement.” Participants (called “pilgrims”) spend three days in worship, study, fellowship, and communion. Men and women attend separate weekends. Its purpose is to inspire, challenge, and

equip attendees for a closer relationship with Christ, and to active service in their homes, churches, and communities. In one church in particular I served, a number of people from the congregation participated in this Walk to Emmaus. Of course, the name came from Luke's narrative of Jesus and the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus.

I think sometimes the church has failed to offer those kinds of experiences where our hearts can be warmed and set on fire for the God! Hopefully, it can happen in a Sunday morning worship service, or a Bible study, or a small group meeting. But we probably need more settings for this to happen.

We're looking at some of the truths packed into this story from Luke 24. One of the interesting aspects of this story is that, for a while, these 2 disciples did not recognize Jesus. A couple of spinoffs from this: *It highlights the mystery of the resurrection body.*

This isn't the only instance where, at first, the disciples didn't recognize the resurrected Christ when He appeared to them. His resurrection body was similar to His physical body – he showed Thomas, the doubter, His hands with the nail holes, and his side with the mark left by the soldier's spear. But He could appear, and disappear just like that (snap), or ease through the wall of a house.

The Bible says that if we are a follower of Jesus, when He appears, we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2). And that one day, when this physical body is gone, we will have a *spiritual body, a resurrection body*, suitable for our life in heaven. Will we know each other? I think so! Will our resurrection body be exactly like this body? I hope not! (I'd like to be taller, better looking, with less belly and more muscle!). There's a *mystery* as to what Jesus' resurrection body was like, and to what our resurrection body will be like. That's ok. We don't have to understand it all now.

But this account in Luke also reminds me that Jesus is sometimes in our midst, even walking with us, and we don't recognize Him. Sometimes Jesus appears to us in the needs of those around us. You remember the parable: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me" (Matthew 25:35-36).

And then, there are times when we are kind of like these 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus. Something's going on in our life that makes us feel hopeless...confused...grief stricken... remorseful...doubtful...broken. And it seems like God is far away. But He isn't. Remember that little inspirational piece that was popular some years back. "Footprints."

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.

Scenes from my life flashed across the sky.

In each, I noticed footprints in the sand.

Sometimes there were two sets of footprints; other times there was only one.

During the low periods of my life I could see only one set of footprints, so I said, "You promised

me, Lord, that you would walk with me always. Why, when I have needed you most, have you not been there for me?"

The Lord replied, "The times when you have seen only one set of footprints, my child, is when I carried you."

Remember that, in our lowest times, we are not alone.

One more brief note about this story in Luke, something easy to miss: *After their encounter with Jesus, these 2 disciples headed back to Jerusalem.* "That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together...then they told what had happened on the road" (Luke 24:33,35).

They had already walked 7 miles. It was late, probably even dark. But they wanted to share what had happened! They had to talk about their encounter with Jesus. They had to be part of that group of followers who would now trumpet to the world that Jesus had risen from the dead!

You see where I'm going with this, don't you! (Kind of a follow up of last week's sermon: This kind of good news just can't be hidden!). *A genuine encounter with Christ never just stops with our soaking up the experience for ourselves!* The road **to** Emmaus always has to lead to the road **from** Emmaus.

That was true for John Wesley. He went on to say this, "I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart." He prayed for those who had hurt him and used him. He openly shared with others what he felt in his heart.

We've heard it a million times, and it's true: We have to put our faith into action. Serving others. Loving others. Being light in a dark world. Not being afraid to talk about Jesus – sometimes we are the only Bible a foolish world will read.

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