

Disciples - Walk With Jesus

May 8, 2011
Luke 24: 13 – 35

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If there is an essential scripture for our walk with Jesus, it would be the story of the road to Emmaus--the story of two traveling companions who meet our resurrected Lord.

In the weeks after Easter, we often focus on the resurrection stories. These past weeks we heard from the gospel of John. On Easter morning, overlooking the ocean, we heard of Mary's experience. While she looked into the tomb where Jesus no longer lay, he came up behind her. Supposing him to be the gardener she cried out, "Sir, tell me where you've laid him and I'll take him away." Jesus said, "Mary." When Jesus speaks her name she recognizes him... "Rabbouni!"

In last week's story, Jesus comes to the disciples displaying the wounds of his hands and his side. By these, they recognize him.

In both resurrection stories, recognition leads to a new commission. Mary is to go to the disciples and tell them Jesus goes to their father and His father, your God and my God. Disciples, you to whom I've given the Holy Spirit, forgive.

Notice how the stories of the resurrected Jesus do not have him rise up on the earthly horizon like the sun, giving everyone the same experience of his light. He doesn't even appear to Pilate and demand an audience before the crowd. Probably it is true what Alex spoke on Easter during the children's time. If Jesus appeared back in the flesh to the multitude, they'd just have to kill him all over again. Instead Jesus appears to a few people who are ready to see him.

Jesus calls Mary's name, calling her to claim a new intimacy with God, "I'm going to my God and your God." Jesus shows his disciples his wounds, a sign that the worst of humanity cannot overcome him, breathes on them the courage to bear their own wounds to tell the world. Jesus meets people as they are ready to meet him.

The point of the resurrection, for me, has everything to do with the idea that Jesus continues to appear, continues to come, when we are ready for God to take hold of us--ready to be turned toward Life.

Jesus can appear anywhere to anyone: on the road to Emmaus or on the road to Costa Mesa, to an unknown apostle or to a Newport blonde. Jesus comes when we are ready for God take hold of us. I assume that's why you are here.

Let us join Cleopas as his friend walking on the road to Emmaus discussing "these things." Picture yourself on the road with him. It has been three days since Jesus died on the cross. Some people you know went to the tomb and found there, not Jesus, but angelic like beings saying "he is not here, he is risen." What do you think you might be discussing? Would you be wondering if the testimony was true? Maybe you would argue that someone must have taken the body from the tomb so they might say that Jesus was risen as he promised. Perhaps you are fretting about what is next because Jesus seems to not be who he said he was. The scripture doesn't tell. All we know is we are on the road to a village called Emmaus. As we walk, the resurrected Jesus comes near.

When Jesus joins Cleopas and his friend on the road, whatever it was that they were discussing, they are so engaged in it, it keeps them from seeing Jesus. Jesus interrupts their chatter and invites them into a conversation, "what are you talking about?"

Their response is ironic: are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who doesn't know about these things?

Jesus, containing a laugh, asks, "What things?"

You know, they say, the things about Jesus of Nazareth...He was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. He was crucified, and after 3 days the women went to the tomb and saw there angels. But they did not see him.

They did not see him? Why do you look for the living among the dead?

In this resurrection appearance, Jesus does not show his hands and his side, the visible bodily signs of his resurrection. Perhaps he's playfully hiding his hands in his pockets. More important to this telling was how Jesus' rising fits into the larger story of how God saves God's people. From the days of Moses God liked to go walking with God's people, saving them from servitude, inviting them to live in a new

land of promise.

Why do you look for the living among the dead?

We had hoped... you had hoped...

That your mom would have been able to be more loving or more proud?

That your child would have found a better way?

That drugs and alcohol would have not infiltrated your home?

That women would no longer be traded and children no longer orphaned?

That no country would need to send her sons and daughters off to war?

Why do you look for the living among the dead?

Because we had hoped that all would be right, all would be redeemed.

Now what I'm about to say is not for the theological journals. When I think of redemption, immediately I think of standing in line with my trash bag full of empty cans and containers, waiting to put them into the machine to get a few dollars. We redeem what we are through with. The fact that all is not redeemed means that God is not through with this world. God is not ready to recycle all that is on the earth.

But there is an image found in the Old Testament, in the book of Isaiah, which tells of a very different kind of redemption.

Isaiah 53:4: "Surely he has borne our grief, and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed."

A few chapters in Isaiah are referred to as the Suffering Servant scriptures. They have a long history of interpretation rooted in the Jewish exile following the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. The suffering servant is associated with Israel herself, the suffering of a nation for iniquities beyond that which they earned. But we, Christians, cannot read these scriptures today without seeing Jesus. That is the success of Luke and the other gospel writers. Those who met the resurrected Jesus long ago read the scriptures and found there evidence that what many claimed at the time to be a defeat of a heretic was instead God's victory.

Jesus standing in their midst, signals that the story

will go on.

Jesus is not through with you or me. Jesus is not through with your family. Jesus is not through with the abused or abandoned. Jesus is not through with the nations. Jesus is not done with those who seek him.

In the midst of all that is not right, Jesus continues to appear when we are ready for God to take hold of us, ready to be turned towards life giving life. It does happen anywhere to anyone. After all, Jesus broke through to Paul, the persecutor of the Christians, when he travelled another road. Jesus broke through to a middle aged man I met who saw a light in a New England church and found his way into sobriety. Jesus broke through to a college girl I once knew who decided to ride her bicycle to a church and found a community of love. Jesus broke through yesterday and last week when some of you chose to go on retreat with Chip and others came into prayer with me.

Jesus is not through with us. It is important to notice that transformation occurs when we are ready to get on the road to discipleship. When we are ready to stop saying, "Oh God loves me," while we sit on the couch and instead say "Oh, how I love God...it's time to get up and walk!" If you have any doubt, take time to talk with Doreen or with Kip or with Tedd or with Myrona or any number of you I could list here. They'll tell you. When they got up and started walking by faith...Kip has compared it to kicking the can down the road for a time...when they committed themselves to an act of discipleship... God took hold of them in extraordinary ways. That's why we're here, right? So how about you? What's your commitment to discipleship, how will you start walking on the road referred to only as "The Way?"

Let it simmer awhile as we finish our story:

They drew near the village. Jesus appeared to be going on further. But they constrained him, saying "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent."

Still blind to who he is, Cleopas and his companion choose to keep the interpreter of scripture in their midst. Evening falls. The day of resurrection is at its end. A new story is being written out of the old. At the table, the last meal of the day, those who walked the road to the village of Emmaus meet. One picks up the bread, gives thanks, breaks it and gives it to his two companions. Scripture declares: "Their

eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight.”

That hardly seems fair, this vanishing. It doesn't allow Cleopas to take Jesus by the hand and use him for show and tell. Look everyone! It is him. Jesus, show them your hands and your feet. As soon as their eyes are opened, Jesus disappears.

Part of the miracle of Easter is that, despite the lack of evidence, those who meet the resurrected Jesus are compelled to tell of it. Cleopas and his companion race back to Jerusalem to tell the others “he revealed himself in the breaking of the bread.” And, they nod. Peter saw him too, they say.

They are sure they have seen him. They are certain they can find him in their reading of scripture. And, they are beginning to trust that God really does care about them. Their story as Jesus' disciples will go on and God will be there, with them, on the road. God's story and their story are intertwined.

Such is the boast and such is the responsibility of Christians.

Our story is intertwined with God's own story. What we do tells about the ways of God. Of course God is going to want to be part of the conversation! As we allow it, God will keep speaking to us through scripture, through life experience, and through vision. Sometimes it will be the risen Jesus who carries to us the message. “I live” he proclaimed in the breaking of the bread.

But it is up to us to get on the road to discipleship. That's where we meet the risen Jesus. That's where God can take hold of us.

The desert fathers, those who devoted their lives to prayer and service to God, named as part of every prayer a commitment. It could be to spend time with God, spend time in writing, or performing an act of service. As necessary to prayer as thanksgiving was that promise of a disciple.

I want you all to get on that road, or back on the road, to discipleship. It's so much fun! You've got Jesus popping up from time to time. You get to witness real live healings. You get called to do crazy things outside of your comfort zone and see how God works beyond your imagination. You get to walk with some amazing people.

I invite you to use the time of silence after I finish for just such a prayer, to make a discipleship promise. (If you want, you can use the back of the

information card we filled out earlier to write down your commitment, allow us to assist you through prayer, an invitation, or a phone call, or whatever other way we can.) It doesn't have to be the biggest thing in your life, it could be. But it could also be a small thing. Remember, a promise can become part of daily prayer.

Let's use this little bit of time to take a step back on that road, or a step further down the road to discipleship. For the object of the “show and tell” of God's love...well, it is the disciples--it is you.

Luke 24: 13 - 35

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. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. and he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad. 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?’ 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.’ 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.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But 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. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They 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?’ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.