

Discipleship in the Lectionary - 04/23/2023



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Third Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary Year A

Sunday, April 23rd

Luke 24:13-35

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Walking and Talking

The lectionary for the third Sunday of Easter is Luke's account of events later in the day on that first Easter Sunday. Luke describes an encounter between two disciples and the risen Jesus on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. This encounter is not found in any other Gospel. There is much more to this story than merely a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus.

Luke 24:13-35 Commentary

The story of the encounter between the risen Jesus and two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus takes place immediately after the Easter narrative in Luke's Gospel (24:1-12). These events occur later in the day on Easter Sunday and are found only in Luke's Gospel. Other than being close to Jerusalem, the location of Emmaus is uncertain.

¹³ That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

"*That very day*" - The text is very clear on the timing of these events. This is the first Easter Sunday. "Two of them" refers back to v.9: "*and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.*" These two disciples were not part of the eleven but included in "*all the rest.*" Naturally the two disciples' conversation was consumed by the recent events. The assumption is that these disciples were returning home since they invited Jesus to stay with them (v.29). As Jesus drew near, they were prevented from recognizing Him (*ekratounto* - held/prevented, passive tense). Some argue that the risen Christ in His glorified body would not have been recognizable to those who only recently had seen Him alive. There is also the fact that the two disciples were preoccupied with their conversation and did not expect to encounter Jesus. These are all valid points but the text suggests there is more here than simply the disciples did not recognize Him.

¹⁷ And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

Jesus meets the two disciples where they are on the road and engages them in conversation. Only one of the disciples is named. There is much conjecture over the identity of the second. Some even speculate Luke is the second, unnamed disciple. Others suggest the second disciple may be Cleopas' wife because of how they jointly extend hospitality to Jesus (v.29). Nothing else is known of Cleopas. Verse 18 illustrates how the events in Jerusalem relative to Jesus were being talked about by everyone.

¹⁹ And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹ 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 happened. ²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even 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 him they did not see."

Cleopas summarizes his understanding of the events to Jesus. This statement reveals Cleopas thought of Jesus as a prophet. There is no doubt who Cleopas sees as responsible for the death of Jesus - the Jewish authorities since Roman authorities are not mentioned. Sadly, Cleopas uses the past tense - "*But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel...*" (v.21). The hope expressed one week ago during the triumphal entry has changed to hopelessness. Cleopas does not appear to believe the testimony of the women (typical of Jewish culture at the time), particularly when men did not see the same thing. Despite this sadness and hopelessness, the two disciples at least have the courage to talk about these things with a perceived stranger.

²⁵ And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Jesus rebukes the two disciples for not understanding and being slow to believe. Jesus then reveals Himself through His interpretation of the Scriptures. Moses and all the Prophets is synonymous with the Old Testament which ultimately points to Christ. The Bible has one unified message of salvation and a unified plan of all history.

²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

It appears the two disciples have reached their home and according to Jewish tradition they insist Jesus stay with them. What follows is described using almost the identical words as used in the breaking of the bread during Luke's Last Supper (22:19a). It is also significant that it is Jesus and not Cleopas performing this function. The actions performed with the bread - took, blessed, broke, and gave - are also the same actions Jesus performed with the loaves at the feeding of the five thousand (9:12-17). It is during this sacrament celebrated by the risen Jesus Himself that the eyes of the two disciples were opened and they recognized Him. At this point Jesus vanishes. It is also noted here how when Jesus correctly interpreted the Scriptures, their hearts burned within them. The Scriptures, as the inspired Word of God, have the same effect today.

³³ *And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

The disciples immediately return the seven miles to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples. When they find them, the other disciples were sharing another resurrection story of Jesus appearing to Peter. In sharing their own resurrection story, Cleopas and the other disciple attribute the act of the breaking of the bread as what was instrumental in revealing Jesus to them.

Reflections

The two disciples in this story are going along the road in a state of hopelessness. The hopes of Palm Sunday were dashed by the horrors of Good Friday. Hope had become hopelessness. As they go along the road Jesus drew near to them and went with them. Jesus comes to us, not the other way around. This meeting along the road to Emmaus and subsequent meal follow the pattern of a Reformed worship service. Like any true Christian worship service, the Scriptures are interpreted, and Christ is proclaimed. There can be no higher form of the Word being truly preached when it is the risen Living Word doing the preaching! No wonder their hearts were burning! Like any true Christian worship service, the two disciples also experience fellowship with Christ. They extend hospitality and they experience table fellowship, but it goes further. The roles of the guest and the host are reversed. Christ assumes the role of the host. It is He who blesses and breaks the bread. The language used here is highly liturgical and it is obvious Christ is celebrating the Last Supper. This is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper with the risen Christ as the Celebrant. This is another aspect of true Christian worship - the sacraments are rightly administered. It is during the sacrament of the Lord's Supper that Christ reveals Himself to the two disciples just like Christ reveals Himself to us in the same way. Again, like in any true Christian worship, the faith of the disciples is restored and sustained as they rush back to Jerusalem to proclaim the risen Christ.

The walk to Emmaus can also be likened to a pilgrimage. The walk to Emmaus begins in a state of grief, depression, and trauma from the events of the last few days. One can imagine the walk began with slow, painful steps away from their dashed hopes and into the spiritual uncertainty of the future. Yet it was on this seven-mile journey that the pilgrims encountered the Living Christ. The pilgrims become transformed, and their journey becomes one of hurried excitement with new meaning and purpose. Even though they are walking back to Jerusalem, they are walking forward along a new path.

The walk to Emmaus is also a model for Christian evangelism – meeting people where they are along the road, walking and talking together, making sense of the world through interpreting the Scriptures, extending hospitality, being in fellowship, and participating in worship.

Application

- How often might the daily concerns of the world cause you to miss the presence of God in your life?
- Is your spiritual life characterized by the joy and excitement that would make you get up rush seven miles to talk to others when you are already tired from a journey?
- Are you willing to walk and talk with others, or do you prefer to travel the path by yourself?
- How does Christ make sense of the world for you?
- In what ways is Christ revealed to you when you engage in worship?