

Luke 24:13-35 “Easter Afternoon” 4/11/21

Margaret Thatcher was prime minister of Great Britain from 1979 until 1990 - During that time a terrorist's bomb exploded in the conference room during an important government meeting - Margaret Thatcher survived the blast, but some of her cabinet members were killed

The following Sunday, Margaret went to Church as she always did - But that particular Sunday seemed different - As Margaret sang the hymns, listened to the message, saw the candles on the altar and the sunshine streaming through the stained-glass windows, she began to weep

She wept because everything around her had been changed by the loss of her friends - The familiar had now become strange - The goodness and beauty of the world around her almost seemed too much to bear¹

If we can relate to Margaret Thatcher's grief, maybe we can relate to the grief of Jesus' disciples as they walked along the road to Emmaus looking sad on that first Easter afternoon

Today, as we gather for worship, it is now a week past Easter Sunday - But, in our Gospel passage, it is only mid-day on that first Resurrection Sunday - Luke 24:13 “That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.”²

One disciple, we learn a few verses later, was named Cleopas, but the other is never named - Since they are never called “men” by Luke, some have guessed that the other disciple was Cleopas’ wife - But the text could just as easily be describing another man

We do not know a lot about the village of Emmaus either - The Scriptures only mention it in is this one passage - Josephus mentions a village of Emmaus in his massive 20 volume history book “The Antiquities of the Jews” - He places the village about 20 miles from Jerusalem

¹ Todd Outcalt, “The Best Things in Life Are Free,” 1998, (Health Communications, Inc., Deerfield Beach, Florida)

² Scripture quoted has been taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version,

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Therefore, when Scripture says 7 miles, it may be the location of where they encountered Jesus, and not the location of Emmaus - And even the translation of the words "7 miles" is difficult - Because the original Greek may literally be translated six tenths, six, or sixty racecourses³ - And neither is the exact length of a racecourse known

Fortunately, Luke is describing a resurrection appearance of our Lord Jesus - And not trying to pinpoint exactly where this journey took place - Or even where the village was located - Perhaps Luke's original readers all knew where Emmaus was located, and how long the measure of a racecourse was, so this distance wasn't vague to them at all

What we do know are just a few things about Cleopas and the other disciple - They had been in Jerusalem during the events of Holy Week - They were followers of Jesus - And now that the Jewish Sabbath is over, they are traveling to Emmaus on that first Easter day

While we don't know the exact location of the journey - They probably were no more than about 2 hours from Jerusalem - Because verse 33 mentions that they rushed back after seeing the resurrected Jesus to tell the 11 remaining disciples about it

They were talking on the road and were obviously in sadness and gloom - All of a sudden Jesus appears and walks along with them - J. A. Seiss said about Jesus, "When grief and trouble are upon His disciples, He takes it to heart, and is drawn towards them in loving sympathy"⁴

It is the second time that day that Jesus appeared to followers who were intensely hurting - His first resurrection appearance, early that morning, had been to Mary Magdalene, who stood outside the empty tomb weeping

We may also be certain in our times of sadness and pain that our Lord Jesus is near - The compassion that our Lord showed to those two followers on the road to Emmaus that day, is the same compassion our Lord extends to us

³ Strong's Concordance of the Bible, James Strong, 1850, © public domain

⁴ J. A. Seiss, D. D. as quoted by The Biblical Illustrator, Joseph S. Excell, editor, originally published 1887 in London, England, © public domain

Jesus is there for us, especially in those times when life in this world beats us up - Sometimes life in this world can mean that we are hit with some things that are pretty tough to handle - All too often, it seems, we are struggling with issues of grief, sadness, pain, and emotional turmoil

Just like Jesus was there walking along side of those disciples, on the road to Emmaus that day, when they needed Him most - So He is also walking along side of us on our roads of life - Especially on the difficult ones - Our Savior can bring healing to even the worst situations

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.”

Next, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus joins them - But they do not recognize Him - Scripture says, “Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”⁵

At first reading, we might think, how strange for these disciples to not recognize Jesus - Yet there are many possible reasons for this

Perhaps Cleopas and the other follower had just been faces in the crowd - Maybe they were there to hear the Master Teacher's words for the Sermon on the Mount - Or they could have been in that crowd of 5,000 who were miraculously fed by Jesus

In those size gatherings, I can imagine that there were some people who never got close enough to see Jesus clearly - So perhaps Cleopas and the other follower were among their number

And added to that, was that never in a million years would they expect to meet someone they had seen executed on that road to Emmaus - So, it is completely logical that they did not recognize Him

⁵ Luke 24:15b-16

On the other hand, perhaps they had been close enough to touch our Lord - And knew exactly what He looked like - But their recognition was clouded by doubt and disbelief

They had heard some news of Jesus' resurrection - And this guy on the road to Emmaus certainly looked like Jesus - But in their minds they knew that those who are dead stay that way - And therefore they reasoned this could not be Him

Many today may see Jesus from the distance and then do not recognize that He is right there by their side - That could be someone who was raised in the Faith - Perhaps someone who got involved in Sunday School - Or went to a youth group activity with a friend - But never made that decision to invite Jesus into their life

Seeing Jesus at a distance might even include someone who has read the Bible - Heard that Jesus can be their savior - And decided that someday or other they just might invite the Savior into their lives

Maybe doubt and disbelief are clouding the vision of some - They know others who have a great relationship with Jesus - But cannot grasp how that is possible

Or maybe the sins of this world have so clouded their vision and judgment - That they are lost in that dark place of sin and they do not recognize the one way out into the light of Christ

If you are in any of those places - Jesus wants to be part of your life - Recognize that He is as close to you as He was to those on the road to Emmaus that day - And invite Him to be your savior

John MacArthur presents still another angle - He writes that "Their eyes were restrained and then opened by God - They had been sovereignly kept from recognizing Him until this point (meaning verse 31)

His resurrection body was glorified, and altered from its previous appearance, and this surely explains why even Mary Magdalene did not recognize Him until He spoke her name earlier that day”⁶

Perhaps God had actively intervened to keep Cleopas and the other disciple from recognizing Jesus until it was time for Him to depart - Then He vanished from their sight

His resurrected body was as real as it had ever been and was even capable of being hungry and eating earthly food - Nonetheless, after His resurrection, Jesus possessed certain properties that indicate His mortal body was glorified, in other words, altered in a mysterious way

Christ could now appear and disappear bodily, as seen in this passage - His body could pass through solid objects, such as the grave clothes or the walls and doors of a closed room

He could apparently travel great distances in a moment - Notice that by the time Cleopas and the other disciple had hurried back to Jerusalem, Jesus had already appeared to Peter

To again quote John MacArthur, “The fact that He ascended into heaven bodily demonstrated that His resurrection body was already fit for heaven - Yet it was His body, the same one that was missing from the tomb, even retaining identifying features such as the spear and nail-wounds”⁷

Next, Jesus walks with Cleopas and the other disciple and opens the Holy Scriptures to them - This is an important aspect of this passage - Jesus could have shown them the nail prints in His hands

But instead, He points them to the Scriptures - Telling them that they have been foolish not to believe the prophets - And explaining to them from the Old Testament why the events of Holy Week had been necessary - We too need to heed the instruction we find in God’s Word

Near the end of the day, they invite the Lord to stop with them - And they recognize Him in the breaking of the bread

⁶ The MacArthur Study Bible, John MacArthur author and editor, © 1997, (Word Publishing, Nashville, TN)

⁷ *ibid.*

Roger Van Harn writes that this passage reveals four ways that, “Jesus continues to make his presence known - First, the resurrected Christ is revealed in and through the Church, through disciples today who, like Cleopas and the other disciple, are “gathered together” in Jesus’ name

Second, even as Jesus led the disciples in a Bible study, we meet the resurrected Christ through Scripture, in its interpretation and proclamation, and as the Holy Spirit illuminates it for us

Third, the resurrected Jesus is known in prayer and in the breaking of the bread of the sacrament when we gather around His table - and -

Fourth, our own witness becomes part of the ongoing witness of the Church to the risen Christ, much as the witness of Cleopas and the other disciple has become part of the ongoing testimony of the Church”⁸

So, today’s passage teaches us that Jesus is walking right along with us in life’s toughest journeys and on our joyous paths - Perhaps like the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus our vision gets clouded enough so we don’t see that our Lord is traveling along the same road with us

But instead of trying to journey through life’s pathways alone, we should take encouragement from God’s Word - Matthew 28:20 records Jesus’ words - He said, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”

Additionally, we are called to encounter our Risen Savior in God’s Word - As He showed Cleopas and the other disciple, there is much in the Old Testament about Him - And, of course, the New Testament is all about our Lord Jesus and His teaching

And finally, like those two disciples who spent that First Easter Afternoon with the resurrected Jesus, we should run and tell others about our Risen Savior

⁸ adapted from The Lectionary Commentary, Roger E. Van Harn, editor,
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