

SERMON – April 26, 2020

The Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)

Our scripture passage this morning starts out “Now that same day...” What same day are they talking about? It was the same day that the women ran to the tomb and found Jesus gone. It was the same day that Peter and some of the others saw that the tomb was empty. All was in chaos. Rumors were circulating that Jesus’ body had been stolen from the grave.

It had been three days since Jesus was beaten, flogged and crucified. Many saw it with their own eyes. He was dead. Not only did they lose a friend, a teacher, a prophet, a miracle maker—a man that truly had the power of God within him—but they lost the deliverer, the one who would once and for all free Israel from its bondage as slaves of Rome.

“They had hoped that he was the one that was going to redeem Israel.” (Luke 24:21). They had hoped. That is in the past tense. It means that they no longer hoped. Jesus was dead. All hope was gone. Maybe that was the reason they set out on the road to Emmaus that day. To run away. To get away from disappointment and despair so that their fear and hurt would go away. Maybe to start completely over and pretend that none of it even ever happened.

There is not one of us that hasn’t been on the road to Emmaus. The road may take us shopping to buy things that we don’t need so that we’ll feel better. It may take us to the freezer to grab a quart of ice cream, or to the pantry for an entire bag of chips; or to the refrigerator for some beer or a bottle of wine. Maybe it takes us to a movie, a movie that we don’t even want to see. It may take us to a bar. Maybe it takes us to a dealership to buy a car, or a boat. Maybe it will take us to church. The road to Emmaus is where we go or what we do to help us forget our problems, our failures, our worries.

Maybe that’s how it was with Cleopas and the other. They just wanted to leave town and forget about Jesus. So they took off down the dusty road to Emmaus, a small town about seven miles from Jerusalem. And as they walked, a stranger approached them.

Now at first, Cleopas may have thought that Jesus was a spy, and it took some courage for him to admit that they were followers of Jesus. They did not recognize that the stranger was Jesus. This seems to be a common thread in the events that took place after the resurrection. During the resurrection, somehow Jesus’ body was transformed. In some ways the same; and in other ways different. The women in the garden did not recognize him. Peter and the others did not recognize Jesus on the shore when they were fishing. Cleopas and his traveling companion did not recognize Jesus. Was it because they weren’t really looking and Jesus didn’t have their full attention, or was it because Jesus chose to reveal himself in his own time?

Maybe Luke is trying to tell us something here. Maybe we don't see Jesus and recognize him for who he is until he reveals himself through the Bible—through the story of God, Israel, and the world. But some would say, "I try to read the Bible, but I just don't understand it." Maybe what you need is a teacher, and who would be the best at teaching you how to read scripture? Our best teacher is Jesus Christ himself. That is why it is important, before reading scripture, to pray and ask Jesus for his presence and guidance. In time, he will open your eyes so that you will be able to recognize him and see his face through the scriptures. You will be able to hear his voice in the message that he has for you. You will feel the fire in your heart that only comes from the touch of Jesus through the Spirit.

On the path that day, Cleopas and the other experienced that burning fire in their hearts as Jesus spoke to them. Before they could understand the resurrection that changed everything, Jesus knew that he had to prepare them. Jesus described to them what was said in all of the scriptures concerning himself. Not just some of them; not a chosen few; but all of the scriptures. They needed to understand that through the suffering of one person, the Messiah, Israel was redeemed; the world was redeemed; all of mankind was redeemed. They had to see that Jesus died on the cross that resurrection day, taking with him the sins of the world and overcoming death, so that all who believed in him would have new and everlasting life.

After many words were spoken, the travelers arrived at Emmaus, and Cleopas and the other persuaded Jesus to stay and eat with them. There is a parallel here between the passage in Genesis 3:6-7 and this passage in Luke. The first accounting of a meal in Genesis 3 says, "The woman took some of the fruit, and ate it; she gave it to her husband, and he ate it; then the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked." We recognize this scripture passage as the moment that sin and death came into the world. Peace and harmony with God, and with one another, was disrupted. Mankind would suffer from that day forward, and death was final.

Here, in verses 30-31, Luke reminds us, "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight." The eyes of Cleopas and his companion were open. An aha moment! The sin and death that came into the world during that first meal exited the world the moment that Jesus died on the cross. Jesus took it with him. The curse of that first meal was broken and new life abounds through the body and blood of Jesus Christ! Jesus brought us new life! Jesus gave us victory over sin and death! Jesus gives us hope!

So, just as Jesus appeared in the midst of the disciples in the upper room, in the midst of the women in the garden, on the shore cooking fish in the midst of the fisherman as they fished, in the midst of Cleopas and his companion as they walked along the road, Jesus appears to us in the midst of our ordinary, everyday lives. When he appears, do you recognize him? Do you see Jesus, or do you see only a stranger, a gardener, a person walking along the road behind you, an ordinary meal?

Don't miss him. Don't miss out on what he has in store for your life. Instead of running away from the reality of our lives, how about running into the arms of Jesus? If we listen for him, maybe somewhere deep down in our soul we will hear the voice of love and forgiveness that will drown out our fear and doubt. Maybe we will see through the eyes of Jesus the promise of life and freedom that will break the chains that bind us, and our blindness, boredom and indifference will be no more. If we open our hearts and minds to him and believe in him, that spark that was planted within us by God on the day that we were born will become a burning fire that consumes us, so that we can't wait to tell others what Cleopas and his friend found out that day on the road to Emmaus: Christ is alive! Hope is here!