

Journeying with Jesus

LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church

June 17, 2018 – PM Sermon

Rev. Ruth Boven

Luke 24:13-35

So here's a question for you this evening. When you read or hear Scripture, especially a story like this one, do you imagine yourself in it? Someone once said that "we really can't hear what the stories of the Bible are saying until we hear them as stories about ourselves."

Have you ever noticed that when Luke tells this story of the two traveling disciples, only one of them is given a name? We know that Cleopas was one of the disciples on the road. But we don't know the name of the other disciple. Luke doesn't give it to us. Why? Well, we don't know for sure. But some think Luke does it on purpose, in order for you to put yourself there. In order for you to see your feet there, on that dusty path.

Luke is the only gospel writer who tells the story of what happened on that road, but I believe that every single one of us here tonight has been on that road at one time or another. Because you see, the road to Emmaus is a road of defeat. It's a road of disappointment, of shattered hopes, of broken spirits. We had hoped that he would be the one, they said. We had hoped.

It's not too hard for you to imagine yourself on that path, I'm guessing. We've all hoped for things that didn't materialize. Things like... I don't know – weekend temperatures of 75 degrees? We had hoped.

But of course our hopes run deeper than that too. "We had hoped that the treatment would have done more than it did." "We had hoped that the counseling would help save the marriage." "We had hoped she or he would start coming back to church." "We had hoped the test results would not be what they are." "We had hoped." You and I know so well how hope can evaporate like the morning mist- in this broken, unpredictable world we live in.

If I imagine myself on that dusty road of disappointment, I wonder if I'd also be thinking about my own part in the events that were so heavy on the disciples' minds. What had I done or not done to contribute to Jesus' unjust murder? Might I feel ashamed at my own silence, or desertion, or doubt, or fear?

For the truth is the brokenness isn't only out there, it's also in here. You and I are not just passive players in this world of brokenness. We too are transgressors. We too hurt others. We too sometimes let our own fears, or silence, or apathy contribute to the world's suffering.

All this is to say it's not hard to put ourselves on that road to Emmaus. Head hung low. Heart broken. Feet shuffling. Perhaps holding on to the disciple next to you, when suddenly, unexpectedly, hope comes walking our way.

You know, there is so much to say about Jesus' presence on the road to Emmaus that day. This is such a rich story. But this evening I'll touch on just three ways that you and I are offered hope in that encounter with Jesus on the road.

Here's the first thing to notice about that meeting: Jesus makes the first move. Luke gives us this simple but profound sentence as the two confused and despairing disciples journeyed along the road; "Jesus himself came up and walked along with them."

Jesus made the first move. Friends, that's the beautiful truth at the heart of the gospel. The song writer put it, "I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew. He moved my soul, to seek him seeking me. It was not I, who found O Savior, true, no I was found, was found of him."

"Jesus himself came up and walked along with them." What makes it such a remarkable sentence is that it's just 10 verses after the resurrection. Here is Jesus, fresh from the domain of death, and he is out on a dusty road, seeking those bent under a load of grief.

Frederick Buechner says of the text: "You'd have expected a little more post-resurrection fanfare, an angel choir filling the sky with a Hallelujah chorus perhaps. But instead, Jesus is pursuing two sad pilgrims on a dusty road to a little village out back of beyond. He comes in the middle of all their questions. *It's the sheer ordinariness of it all that is so striking.*"

What a stunning reminder that Jesus is closer than we think. Second, Jesus doesn't turn away from those who don't have it all figured out. I hope this gives you comfort. It does me.

Now, Jesus was clearly frustrated with the two disciples on the road that day. They'd heard the first hand report of the women who'd been to the empty tomb – and they didn't believe it. In addition they had Scripture's testimony. They'd probably had Sunday school, catechism, and all kinds of Christian education and still, they didn't get it.

But here's the important thing: Jesus came to them anyway. Which means that he comes to those, like me - who don't have everything all figured out. You know we tend to look to those who evidence strong faith and knowledge and understanding and imagine that Jesus must really like hanging out with them. But that's not what this story says. This story says that Jesus, with grace and patience, comes to these doubting and disillusioned travelers and he walks beside them. He's patient with them. He sticks with them, in fact, until they see for themselves who he is.

I know that there are parents and grandparents in this congregation who worry about the faith, or lack thereof, of their children or grandchildren. This story affirms what the Bible says over and over, that God is a persistent pursuer, who because of his great love for us, will not abandon us on the road of our confusion or rebellion or despair.

The preacher William Willimon tells the story of having coffee with a couple from his church. He asked them about their teenage son. The couple described a relationship so severely broken that they were forced to change the locks on their house because of his volatile and harmful behavior. But one day, the mother explained, their son was able to sneak into their home. He flew up to his bedroom and immediately locked himself inside.

His mother, charged with emotion, stomped out to the shed in the backyard, grabbed a hammer, marched up the stairs to the boy's room, raised the tool directly over her head and smashed the lock clear off his door. She pushed her way into his room, got herself right in his face, and said to him something like this, "I went into labor and suffered because of you. And I will never stop loving you or give up on you."

Then she turned to the pastor and said, "I think God is like that..." Jesus makes the first move and comes, even to those not looking for him.

Finally, Jesus does tell his disciples, tells us, where we can find him.

Luke says that before discovering this was the risen Lord with them, the hearts of the disciples burned inside them as Jesus opened the Scriptures to them. Why did Jesus do that? Why didn't Jesus just open their eyes right then and there and say, see? It's me. I'm risen from the dead. I'm Jesus. Why was their heart-burn so necessary?

Well, again, we don't know for sure but perhaps Jesus had us in mind here. These disciples and even the ones hiding and shaking in their boots back in Jerusalem, they would all eventually get to see Jesus, with their own eyes. But before they could, he showed them, he showed us another way to have Jesus nearby, through Scripture.

We don't get to see and touch Jesus like those first disciples did. But there is another way to have him among us. He comes to us in his Word. The Law, the prophets, the stories of God's people and of God's rescue, they all point us to Jesus, to Emmanuel, God with us.

My brother John, who's also a pastor, had a woman from the community visit his church a few times and then contact him. She said she had this burning and restlessness in her heart and she was convinced that the Bible would give her the peace she was looking for.

In their first meeting my brother opened to the gospel of Mark, in the New Testament, so Mary could quickly learn about Jesus. But, she said, "No. I want to know the whole story." She insisted they begin in Genesis. They even marched through Leviticus and Numbers together on their way to Revelation. Because somehow Mary knew all along that all of it was one story. One amazing story, holding both beauty and ashes, joy and sorrow, suffering and freedom, death and resurrection. Mary saw herself and her life in those pages and stories and thankfully she came to see Jesus in them too.

That's why in this place when we gather to worship – we open This Word together. Because when we do, we discover more about ourselves and more about how all of Scripture points to Christ, to Love incarnate. Every page of it points to our crucified and risen Savior.

And when we gather at that table, we're met there too, by the Spirit of Christ our Lord. And there we're strengthened to live out God's love in this world, which is also where Jesus said we are sure to find him.

This week I was challenged by something I read and I'll conclude by challenging you with it too. One of the commentators on this text wonders how we might live differently if we *acted* like God's promises were true. "If it's true," he writes, "that God raised Jesus from the dead... if it's true that God promises to renew the whole creation and grant us new life... if it's true that nothing, nothing we've done or has been done to us, can separate us from the love of God... if it's true that God will not turn God's back on any of us but always reaches out to us in grace, mercy, and forgiveness... If *any* of this, let alone *all* of this, is true, then how might we live our lives this week differently?"

I don't know what your answer is or what that might look like for you. But I do know, that whatever path your feet travel this week, Jesus will come and walk with you. I do know that whether your faith is strong or whether it's thread-bare, God's love for you and grip on you is stronger still.

May this Word, and Jesus' presence with you on the road enable you, like the disciples, to declare with your actions this week, it is true. The Lord is risen.
Alleluia!

© Rev. Ruth Boven