

Sermon for Sunday, April 26, 2020 by Rev. Jon Strasman

The Road to Emmaus

Text: Luke 24:13-35

Have you taken any good walks lately? It seems like more and more people are out walking these days. Walking can clear your mind... give you a change of heart... especially if you are cooped up all the time. Even getting out and taking a bike ride or drive is good medicine. Marcella, our 3 year old, asks to go in her car seat daily. And when she does, she sees everything with fresh eyes, especially the beautiful pink rainbow sky she saw on Friday night. She points to things we often miss.

Our Gospel for today is about a life-changing walk... a journey that can turn us around... that can move us from sadness to joy. It is known as the Road to Emmaus story in Luke's Gospel. It is one of my favorite stories in the Bible.

The Emmaus story is a resurrection appearance of Jesus on Easter Sunday afternoon. Two disciples, Cleopas and an unnamed disciple (which many scholars believe is us, the reader), were walking to Emmaus, a 7 mile journey from Jerusalem.

While they were walking, Jesus came up to them, and walked with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him at first. Perhaps it's because Jesus looked different in his resurrection body. Or maybe it's because they were so weighed down by grief after Jesus' crucifixion and death on the cross that they couldn't see beyond the tip of their nose. Luke says they were looking sad and broken down by the events that had taken place in Jerusalem that week. Some women in their group even told them that day that Jesus had risen. But they didn't believe them. They were done with this whole project. They were walking away from it all. The one they had placed their hope in, the one they had left everything for had died.

Can you relate to this level of grief? Can you relate to just walking away from something? Can you think of a time when your hopes were dashed? You just want to hole up and not be social.

I remember when Jeranna and I lost our first baby in utero during seminary. At the doctor's office, we were expecting one thing, and during the ultrasound were told another. There was no heart beat or movement. We were absolutely devastated. Our hopes of having our first child were dashed. This experience colored our world for a long time. We discerned what was comforting by others and what wasn't helpful. But it also gave us compassion for those who have experienced this form of silent grief.

The Road to Emmaus is a story of hope. It is about renewal and healing that took place over the course of an evening when a stranger, Jesus, was welcomed on their journey.

Jesus pursued these two disciples and asked them what they were talking about on the way. He journeys with them, listening to them tell about the events of the last week. Jesus gave them a chance to share the trauma they experienced. He then opens the word to them as they walked along. But they still didn't recognize him. Finally, when he broke bread with them that night, they recognized him and Jesus disappeared. They turned around and ran back a night 7 miles to tell the others. Their grief was turned into joy.

Our typical Sunday worship really mirrors this encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

First, we gather. In church we offer hospitality to friends and strangers. Jesus promises to be present when two or three gather in his name. At the beginning of the service we confess our sins and brokenness. We acknowledge our grief over our sin. We admit our lack of faith or the times we don't invite Jesus into our hearts and minds. We sing a Kyrie, which means Lord have mercy on us. We then sing a hymn of praise remembering God's saving act in Jesus Christ. We have the prayer of the day that sums up our lessons for the day.

Then we move from the gathering to the Word.

On the road Jesus opened the scriptures to the two disciples beginning with Moses and all the prophets. This must have been quite a Bible study. Then Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in all

the scriptures... that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise again. This would be like our readings and sermon.

But their eyes were still not opened to seeing Jesus.

Sometimes when we gather for worship we too are weighed down by many things. Perhaps we are despairing or grieving. Maybe we had a fight with a loved one before church or that week. Maybe we are distracted by the cares of the world and are blinded to Jesus' presence.

In our story, Jesus' Word was strangely warming their hearts. They said, "Were not our hearts burning within us?" This is the work of the Holy Spirit when the scriptures are opened up. God's word never goes out and returns empty says Isaiah.

Then there is the meal. As it was getting late the stranger, Jesus, walks ahead, but the two disciples invite him to stay for dinner. They offered Jesus hospitality. Just imagine the blessings they would have missed out on if they did not invite Jesus in.

Hebrews 13:2 says, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."

It was in the meal, the way Jesus broke the bread, lifted the cup and gave thanks that they recognized him. It was the Lord's Supper all over. Jesus promise fully present in the meal. He forgives all of our sins. He lifts us from our despair. He sets us free to serve the neighbor in love. We are turned around too.

And finally we have the sending. In worship we say go in peace to love and serve the Lord. "Thanks be to God."

The two disciples ran back with peace and joy to Jerusalem to tell the others that Jesus was alive. They couldn't wait until morning. The news was too good. After worship, we too are called to live out the good news in our daily lives... in our vocations.

We too are on the Road to Emmaus. And along the way, Jesus meets us in the face of others, in the word, in the meal, and in our vocations. Because we are human we will miss seeing Jesus in the other, but he will never give up on showing us his presence until he calls us home. Amen