

Pastor Jon's May 23, 2023 Sermon based on the Road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-35. "Jesus Presence in Word and Sacrament Turns Us Around"

First of all, welcome to our new members, the Gross family and the Krampien family. And congratulations to Ellie Lynwood who will be taking her first communion today.

This Road to Emmaus story has a special meaning to me. It was the Gospel used at both my Grandpa Bert and my Dad's funeral. It is an Easter text. A resurrection appearance of Jesus on Easter Sunday. It is a story of hope and new beginnings. Like the two disciples, Jesus finds us on our walk, wherever that may be, and whatever shape we are in. Jesus and the Holy Spirit have the ability through the Word and Sacraments to turn us around... to turn our mourning into dancing.

Interestingly enough, this story mirrors the four movements of our worship services every week, where we gather, hear the word, share a meal, and are sent out again.

First of all we gather. You no doubt came today with a lot on your hearts and minds. We come with our scars from the week. We come with the things we have done and left undone that maybe we could have done better. We may come with some sadness or need for forgiveness. We may need a word that reorients us as to what is important in our lives and in our world. So we gather.

I can relate to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They are sad after Jesus' death on the cross and their hopes dashed. My dad's birthday would have been Tuesday of this week. He would have turned 75. My brother and I both shared sadness on the phone this week as we remembered dad.

The two disciples are walking away from something. The one they had hoped would redeem Israel from the grip of the Roman Empire was gone from their sight. They are heading to Emmaus, maybe back home to go to work or see family, some seven miles away. This is even after they heard from the women that the tomb was empty and that Jesus was alive. They couldn't wrap their heads around this idea of resurrection or couldn't believe it.

But then, Jesus came up to them and walked with them. But they didn't recognize him at first. Luke tells us, "Their eyes were kept from recognizing him." Jesus asked, "What are you discussing with each other as you walk along?" They looked sad and said, are you the only stranger who hasn't heard about the events of the past week... you know about Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. But Jesus, wanting to hear more says, "What things?"

What keeps us from recognizing Jesus' presence among us?

Then comes the Word. Jesus did a Bible study with them as they walked along. I would love to be in a Bible study with Jesus. Beginning with Moses and the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in the scripture... how the Messiah would suffer and die. But they still couldn't recognize him. Perhaps their grief was so heavy that they couldn't see beyond the tip of their nose. Or maybe it was like the parable of the sower, they weren't open to hearing the Word... like the seed sewn among the thorns, the cares of the world, or the lure of wealth, or the desire for more things comes and chokes the Word and it yields nothing.

Then there is the meal.

But as evening approached, Jesus started walking ahead. They called him back and offered him hospitality. Hebrews 13:2 says, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." By offering hospitality to this stranger, they hosted the Risen Christ without knowing it. How often do we miss Jesus' presence in our lives?

The very act of offering hospitality and sharing a meal with this stranger allowed them to see that it was Jesus. When Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them, maybe like at the Last Supper, their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus. Then Jesus vanished from their sight. I find this odd.

Then they realized that during that Bible study, their hearts were burning within them. So they turned around at night, with no flashlights in those days, and went and told the others Jesus had risen indeed. This is what call the sending in church. Go in peace...

I love this story because Jesus always comes to us today veiled. He comes when two or three gather in his name. He comes in the Word and under the bread and wine. Jesus comes in the presence of strangers or those in need.

When we read the Bible and hear the good news of Jesus, the Holy Spirit makes our hearts burn within us. It awakens and creates faith in us. God's word can also convict us and get us to repent or turn around.

I find grace in the fact that these disciples, even after hearing about the resurrection from the women they walked away. Can you relate to walking away from God? But Jesus found them on the road. They weren't looking for Jesus. Jesus found them. They encountered Jesus in the meal, they found joy again. The breaking of the bread and Jesus' presence turned them around.

This is Holy Communion to us. In this meal, the Risen Christ meets us in simple bread and wine or grape juice. We are promised forgiveness and set free to love one another as Jesus loved us.

This is the sending. We come as we are, we hear the Good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, we share a meal with Jesus as the host, and we are sent out to go in peace and serve the Lord.

May you be refreshed and renewed this day by your encounter with Jesus in our Gathering, the Word, and the Sacrament. May your mourning turn into dancing.