

On the Road Again.....
Luke 24: 13-35
Don Lincoln

Every week, we send out letters to visitors who have left a mailing address, thanking them for joining us in worship, expressing a willingness to engage in further conversation if that would be helpful, and inviting them to fill out and send back a little yellow “first impressions” card if they’re willing. We want to hear from people who visit. The card asks three questions:

- 1. What did you notice first?**
- 2. What did you like best?**
- 3. What did you like least?**

We don’t get all the cards back, but we get many, and I see every one. They contribute to my thinking about and leading of this great congregation. They factor into the kinds of things I talk about with elders and deacons or staff. And since I’m talking about these first impression cards, it’s probably not a huge leap for you to suspect a recently returned card caught my eye.

What did you notice first?

Smiling faces.

Yay! It’s so simple.

What did you like best?

Friendly people – good theme; many opportunities to serve.

Yes!! This is good!!

What did you like least?

The sermons seem short.

I was so glad that wasn’t the answer for what they liked MOST!!! We don’t date these and we don’t ask for their names, but I suspect that was from a communion Sunday, when sermons have to be shorter. Most of us know, at Westminster, turning the building and parking lot around on Sunday morning does not allow us to go more than an hour. And we trust very clearly that the Holy Spirit can get things done in an hour. We may not do everything well, but we DO know how to finish worship on time! And don’t worry. I’m not going to prove how LONG I can preach today, just because of that card!!!

Especially after reading a relatively long story. It's long but it's lovely, this story of the Emmaus Road journey. It's one of my favorites in scripture. It ranks up there with another Luke story – the Prodigal Son – which is a favorite of so many – about this God who's looking down the road constantly for that wayward son who is gone; a story of God's grace. And this story is the same. It's rich and overflowing – a treasure trove of theological inclinations. It's classic Luke. Remember – in Luke we began the Jesus story with Luke's unique, touching, intimate nativity story – Mary and the annunciation of a birth; her going to meet her cousin, Elizabeth; who's pregnant; the trip to Bethlehem; angels, shepherds, manger..... it seems fitting Luke would end his Gospel with a lovely narrative.

First, notice how ordinary things are on that road. Despite the fact the text says it was **ON THAT SAME DAY – Easter; the day of resurrection** – there is no spectacular revelation taking place on this walk. Jesus is not glowing – he's not doing magic tricks – he's not blowing them away with glorious resurrection attire. He's not scaring the daylights out of them.

What a lovely gift that is for us. I hadn't noticed it before. While there are, indeed, times when magnificent things happen – angels appear to shepherds, saying “be not afraid,” – you and I know that life is mostly very ordinary moments – times when there is nothing spectacular going on – which may also be the very times God is made manifest – when God sneaks into the scene unannounced and with no fanfare.

I love that image in this text. For right here is an example that faith is not coerced or pressured by overwhelming revelations to the unprepared. Let me say that again: Faith is not coerced or pressured by overwhelming revelations to the unprepared. And take note – Jesus' resurrection appearances are all to His disciples, not to unbelievers on the street or in the synagogues, to frighten them into acquiescing to faith.¹

The text tells us the eyes of Cleopas and his friend were kept from recognizing Jesus.

A little side here about Cleopas and his friend. Someone mentioned to me at chapel this week that they always loved this story because the friend is never named, and this person always thought that could him. What a lovely image. There are some scholars who think the other on the road with Cleopas may have been a woman.

Anyway, The text tells us the eyes of Cleopas and his friend were kept from recognizing Jesus. I'm not sure what to think of that. It's possible there is no way they could imagine it was Jesus – after all, they had seen him crucified, dead and buried. Maybe their rational minds simply could not make the leap across that gulf – a cognitive denial and subsequent psychosomatic blindness. Perhaps they thought it was just someone who kind of looked like Jesus. Maybe Jesus had his hoodie pulled up close.

It's also possible this is some mixing of divine action – divine intervention – with human freedom. It's possible God kept their eyes from recognizing him. Why might God do that? If you take the story as a whole, maybe that approach starts to make sense. Could it be so these two could hear the story from the scriptures; the proclamation of

the coming one in God's word, and therefore get again that the full import of God's history of activity among human beings, culminating in this Jesus, and then ultimately revealed in the breaking of the bread?

And, if so, might that be the way God was designing this experience on the road so that the proclaiming of the word and celebration of the meal - proclaiming the word and administering the sacraments - (that's my title, Minister of Word and Sacrament) - so that you and I, centuries later, just like those two disciples on the road, might meet the risen Jesus? In other words, isn't every table, the table in Emmaus again? Every time we hear Scripture and come to this table to break bread, we find our hearts strangely warmed. Find this in the very ordinary remembering and retelling of a story. We're not confronted here by some spectacular display of overwhelming presence - but simply story and bread - and the risen Christ meets us.

That is what struck me most about this text this past week. The fact that Jesus is on the road with all of us. We may not recognize Him at first, or even along the way, but sure enough, there are moments where our hearts are strangely warmed by the gift of His company - by the power of His presence. And it is so often in the ordinary things - the retelling or remembering of the story, and in the breaking of the bread - a moment of hospitality - and we realize, "He is there."

A couple weeks ago I had the privilege of taking communion to one of Westminster's saints who was preparing to meet Jesus. Like so many pastoral visits we are privileged to make, it was sacred ground. The hospitable welcome into someone's home; the hospital bed in the living room; the recitation of our common journey; the opportunity to express gratitude to a saint for his service to God's people and his company on the journey, and a shared taste of the body and blood of Christ on our lips.

Jesus was present. No spectacular revelation. No blinding visit from the Risen Christ. But Word proclaimed. Bread broken. Jesus was present. And that saint met his Lord face-to-face on Easter morning. I can only imagine.....

This past week I hurried to the hospital- as all the pastoral team did much of the week. It was Monday, and I was anxious about a visit needing to be made. I walked onto the floor with an unsettled spirit, and there at the nurses station was Ossie Spellman's granddaughter - Spellman, as in Spellman Hall. Ossie was one of the saints of this congregation, Chairman of the School Board for many years. Ossie's granddaughter is a nurse on that floor, and she recognized me, and told me the entire team there on that floor was praying for this particular member of the congregation. It was all I needed, to remember anew that Jesus was present. I was not alone, Jesus was accompanying me on that road and so was the community of the faithful. Just an ordinary greeting but extraordinary presence.

A colleague of mine wrote these words this week. "For forty days, Jesus was around before He ascended. The risen Jesus could've used that time to tell His disciples with what divine mechanism the angels rolled away the stone. He could've explained to

them the odd physics of appearing in locked rooms, divulged where he got the fish he fried for them on the beach, helped them understand why a glorious body still bore awful wounds.

He could've addressed post-ascension practicalities, equipped them with doctrines, vision statements, and achievable goals for the early church. He could've imparted all kinds of goose-bumpy new things, revelations and secrets from beyond the grave."²

But no. Jesus doesn't do that. Here he is. Simply walking on the road.

First he's a stranger – engaging in conversation; then reminds these two of the stories they know from Scripture. Then from stranger He becomes a guest – invited in by them for a meal. We always do an invitation to the Table when we have Communion. Did you ever realize just the fact that you are in the room and we have set this table, we've invited Jesus.

He is the guest now. This is the moment in the story where THEIR hospitality welcomes His presence, before it is even known. You and I do well to remember that hospitality may be the very thing that welcomes Jesus into our lives anew.

Jesus moves in the story from stranger to guest – and then finally becomes the host at the table, feeding our bodies, filling our spirits, warming our hearts.

So – when you leave this place today, remember, the Risen Christ will be on the road with you. In the very ordinary places. Speaking to you; touching you, warming your hearts with His presence. He will be there.

May it be so, in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
AMEN.

1. Fred Craddock, Interpretation Commentary on Luke.
2. Mary Luti, Still Speaking Daily Devotional, April 6, 2018