

Luke 24 The Road to Emmaus: A Metaphor

The Easter celebration continues in our gospel selections as the encounters of those who knew Jesus continue after the discovery of the empty tomb. Each of the gospels contains Jesus' teaching during his earthly ministry as he set his face toward Jerusalem and what it would mean. He gives the disciples predictions about his suffering and death and the resurrection which would follow three days later. Each gospel account describes one or more post resurrection experiences that the disciples have with Jesus before his ascension, although Mark's gospel seems to have those added at a later time as some early manuscripts leave the narrative at the discovery of the tomb. These experiences vary in the time and place of occurrence. Some seem to still be in Jerusalem while others fulfill the message of the angel to Mary that Jesus has gone ahead to Galilee and will meet them there. Most of those who experience this are folks who have been mentioned frequently during the recording of his ministry. The text before us this morning tells that two of his followers have decided to leave town—on that same day that “some of the women” of the group have reported that when they went to the tomb, they found it empty and were told by an angel that Jesus was alive. Within the passage we are told one of them is named “Cleopas”, while the other remains unnamed. What seems to be the most consistent pattern within all of these experiences is that those meeting Jesus do not initially recognize him—even when he appears in that locked room, their first reaction is fear. It is only when he greets them and shows the nail marks that they know him. Mary did not know him at the tomb until he called her by name. So the text this morning deals with two who have known Jesus, and although they were not among the chosen twelve, they were familiar with Jesus and his teachings. As they leave the city, they are discussing all the things that they have witnessed over the past few days. The text doesn't tell us how far away from Jerusalem they are when someone comes up to them as they are walking and inquires about the subject of their discussion. The narrator tells us that this someone is Jesus, but “their eyes are kept from recognizing him.” When the stranger speaks to them, they stop walking and we are told that they look sad. Cleopas responds: Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” The assumption is that anyone they encounter on this road has been in Jerusalem and must have been aware of what happened. But the “stranger's follow up question is “what things?” These followers, saddened by what has happened stop in the middle of the road and reply: “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.” This factual summary is followed by this statement: “But we had hoped...” They have seen the death, but did not understand either Jesus' predictions or the reports of the women about the empty tomb. They did not make the connection. They state their hopes that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel. They did not realize that the redemption of Israel...and all

the world...had been accomplished. They had received the report that angels had told the women that Jesus was alive, but since two of the disciples who later went to the tomb did not see the angels or Jesus they lost hope. "But we had hoped...as they spoke of a future that was not to be, a dream they had that had created energy and enthusiasm but did not materialize. These four words speak of an envisioned future that is now closed off, now irrelevant, dead. Their hopes were based on expectations that the redemption of Israel would be the ousting of Roman rule. Those were human hopes. And like them we often have hopes that are not realized. And because of that, these words, "But we had hoped"... ring true for our lives. They are not the only truth, of course because there is much in our lives that is beautiful, confident, inspiring and more; all of which deserve our gratitude. But they are also true because there is also disappointment, heartbreak, and failure. Often we like to ignore this part of our journey. There are those who read Scripture and feel that what they are promised is a journey through life without problems—that prosperity is the promise. Hearing of their disappointment, Jesus berates these disciples telling them how foolish and slow of heart they have been in understanding what has really been proclaimed through what the prophets had declared. "Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in the scriptures." Those declarations included suffering and death before the resurrection fulfilled the promise of abundant life. This is why I think we can view this narration of that walk to Emmaus as a metaphor for our own lives. When our journey takes us to those places of where we say, "But I had hoped..."for whatever it is that we had envisioned—we need to remember this journey of two disciples who in their sadness found that Jesus came and walked along side them. We need to turn to God's word and realize that Jesus has walked that road and so has experienced all that we have...When his chosen disciples betrayed and then deserted, when he prayed in Gethsemane...when those he journeyed with failed to understand...it seems that the human being in Jesus might have thought, "But I had hoped." Even at this point when all that was predicted has come to pass and his closest friends fail to recognize and understand that he is not just a prophet but the Messiah—the anointed one—Jesus' response seems to indicate that he had hoped for more from them. But still, he walked alongside them and opened the Scriptures to them so that they understood—and then in the sharing of a meal—the breaking of the bread—they knew him. So when we are walking along, we need to keep in mind those disciples who left Jerusalem doubting the news of the empty tomb. When life seems to offer that old reality, we need to open our eyes, for Jesus is among us. He is right there beside us all along. We may be tired, we may be burdened. We may know the stories and teachings but find it hard to do something about them when we see oppression or injustice. We know that Jesus died, but more importantly, he rose again. He died for our sins and His grace has accepted us and will continue to feed and sustain us. Christ has forgiven us. He calls us to put our yoke upon Him. Do it. Put your burdens aside. Let go of your anger. Don't be worried about the hectic pace and feel pressured to keep up with the desires of the

world. Instead, open your eyes wide and let the world be illuminated around you. See where you are needed; where your words and actions can provide aid. See Jesus in the eyes of the stranger and extend His love and His grace to them. N. T. Wright a famous Biblical scholar wrote the following about this story of the Road to Emmaus. Wright said, "At the level of drama it has everything. Sorrow, suspense, puzzlement, gradual dawning of light; then, in the second half, unexpected actions, astonished recognition, a flurry of excitement and activity. It is both a wonderful, unique, spellbinding tale, and also a model for a great deal of what being a Christian, from that day to this, is all about. The slow, sad dismay at the failure of human hopes; the turning to someone who might or might not help; the discovery that in Scripture, all unexpected, there lay keys which might unlock the central mysteries and enable us to find the truth; the sudden realization of Jesus himself, present with us, warming our hearts with his truth, showing us himself as bread is broken." There he is *present to us*. Today, we are all walking on the road to Emmaus. The road to Emmaus is a long and dusty road. As you travel, look back on your story, look at your life now, open the Scriptures anew, and read them from the other end of the telescope; not about a king who came to rule, but to serve. Read about a king who did not sit on a throne but was nailed to a cross. Read about a story of redemption that looked different from what the world could imagine. Read about a king, the King that turned everything upside down and change reality. Jesus came to wash us clean with grace and to show us that He was different and that we need to be different. Look for Him in your neighbor and look for him in the stranger. Christ is with us on this journey. He is there when we forget, and He is there when we remember, we just need to be open to Him—especially we need to look for Him in the unexpected for Scripture tells us that is where God is most often acting in the world. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.