

April 27, 2025
Luke 24: 13-35
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I will start this morning by dating myself. There is an iconic movie called *The Big Chill*. It came out in the early 80s. The soundtrack alone is fabulous. The movie itself has so many great scenes. It's one of those movies that is both a drama and a comedy, so you find yourself laughing through tears. If you haven't seen it, I recommend it for your next rainy-day diversion. It's about a group of college friends who were once very close. They meet for a weekend following the death by suicide of their friend, with whom they each had some unresolved issues. They spend their time together grieving, not just their friend's death, but other painful parts of their lives, including their relationships with each other.

Whenever I read the post-Easter stories, I think about *The Big Chill*. I imagine that in the days following Jesus' death, the disciples had a lot of conversations like the ones in the movie. Just as the women at the tomb remembered what Jesus said about his own death, the rest of his followers talked about and remembered the time they had with Jesus and the things they heard him say or saw him do. I bet they even argued about some of that. One person remembered that he told a parable about a lost sheep and the other said that it wasn't a sheep that was lost, it was a coin. I can imagine that they too experienced laughter through tears as they shared their memories with one another.

Today's story begins with two of Jesus' followers basically getting out of dodge. Jesus had been arrested, crucified, and as this story opens, even his body was missing. The movement was a mess, and they were heavy with grief. Perhaps longing for a safer, easier, calmer reality, the two departed from the other disciples and left Jerusalem altogether.

This is Luke 24:13-35.

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was CleOpas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" 19 He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there they came back and

told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him." 25 Then Jesus said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

When life feels entirely overwhelming, impossible, or just too much, we inevitably look for a way to escape. There are so many ways to escape, some healthier than others. These two did so by leaving town.

I wonder if part of their heated discussion along the road was the two of them justifying to each other why it made sense for them to leave Jerusalem, to leave the other followers, and presumably to leave the movement. Removing themselves from the fight and the resistance was certainly safer. The whole thing had been a lot. Predictably, the act of crucifixion had done just what it was intended to do - break up and break apart collections of people building power. This exit from Jerusalem was basically a white flag. CleOpas and his buddy gave up; their fear and hopelessness won.

Seven miles is a decent walk. The men were used to walking, so from a physical standpoint, the walk was probably not a burden. There are some walks that are longer than others and that has nothing to do with their distance. This spiritual walk they were on, the walk of "everything we hoped for was a lie," was a very long walk. When the psalmist wrote, "...though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..." this would have been that kind of walk. It was a walk burdened with disillusionment and probably a whole lot of shame. How could they have been such fools? They were going right back to their lives from before, the lives that were so hard that leaving their families and following Jesus around for three years seemed like the best option.

Here we are, 2000 years later, and life is feeling incredibly hard for so many of us right now, for so many different reasons - systemic and personal. And when things

are so hard, any outstretched hand in our direction can feel worth grabbing onto. Even the things that won't ultimately serve us – or others – well. Like the two in this story, seeking safety and comfort in escape and individualism, we should pay attention to our own impulses to focus inward, cling tightly to what is ours, and allow our fear of the other to dictate our way of being in the world.

Jesus found these two followers along the road. In that moment, he was a clueless stranger to them. “What are you so heatedly talking about?” he asked.” CleOpas responded, perhaps a little sarcastically or at least impatiently, “What do you think we are talking about? There is literally nothing else to talk about.” He went on to tell this stranger about Jesus, what had happened to him, and what their hopes had been. CleOpas even told him about those silly women and the “idle tales” they told the others after seeing the empty tomb. Jesus responded to CleOpas’ story with, “Oh, how foolish you are...” In his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Bible scholar, Dr. Jeffrey Lyle David wrote that a better interpretation of the original Greek would be something a little more endearing like, “You sweet dummies! How could you miss this?”¹ I wonder if that is the ancient equivalent of “Bless your heart...”

Jesus reminded the men of what the scriptures said about the Messiah. From the sound of it, Jesus talked the rest of the way to Emmaus, perhaps he talked until he was blue in the face. They arrived in Emmaus, and still, he was nothing more than a stranger they met on the road. Have you ever spent time with someone and realized later who you were really talking to? Maybe you met a famous sports hero and didn't know who it was you were meeting until later?

One of my favorite songs is called “One Day,” by a man named Matisyahu. There is a YouTube video of him in a coffee shop where there was a musician playing a ukelele and singing. Not knowing that it was Matisyahu standing there waiting for his coffee, the musician begins to play, “One Day.” He does a pretty good job with the song. You can see in the video that Matisyahu is kind of singing along, and when the singer gets to the part that's sort of an echo, Matisyahu does the echo. Still, the musician has no clue it's Matisyahu singing along with him. He finishes the song, everyone in the place claps and cheers, the musician even shakes Matisyahu's hand and tells him he has a great voice. Matisyahu returns the compliment and then introduces himself. It is fabulous.

It's the same thing here. Jesus walked along the road, talking to them about what the prophets had said about the Messiah, giving them one clue after another, and still they are like, “Yeah, but here we are.” They arrive in Emmaus and “the stranger” plans to move on, but they invite him to have a meal and stay overnight with them. They sat down at the table to eat, and Jesus introduced himself. He didn't do it like Matisyahu by saying, “Hey, I'm that guy.” He broke the bread and gave it to them, and they recognized him.

¹ David Lyle Jeffrey, Luke (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), 284.

They did not recognize Jesus when he talked about who he was. They recognized him when he showed them. Let me say that again: They did not recognize Jesus when he talked about who he was. They recognized him when he showed them. In this story, while CleOpas and the other man were doing Jesus-y things, showing hospitality to a stranger, they recognized Jesus who was doing what Jesus did, breaking bread and eating with all kinds of people, even the ones whose hope was so fragile that three days after his death, they had completely thrown in the towel.

Having experienced the recognition that Jesus' ways were still alive in the world, even in them, their hearts on fire, they did the same thing the women did when they found the tomb empty. They ran to tell the others. This encounter they shared reminded them of all the things they once believed; it brought back the memories of things like truth and justice and healing and love. Their hearts burned while they were at the table, practicing again the kind of love - the kind of hospitality - they learned from Jesus and the others.

Their hearts were re-oriented and re-grounded in the things that are about so much more than the empty promises of the status quo, a status quo that never worked for them. It was about the things that made them feel alive again - even in the shadow of death. The Empire had enticed them with the easy way out, a route out of the pain of the struggle, but through this encounter with the stranger, they swat it away, and reach instead for the glimmer of hope that had found them.

So now, what about us? What will we grab onto?

Will we stay invested in this movement of love when we are afraid, confused, or disappointed with or by life or one another? Amid our own grief, how do we keep ourselves from turning our backs on our neighbors who don't have the privilege of taking a step back or taking time to rest? How do we keep ourselves from abandoning the work we are called to?

Like the two who invited the stranger in, when we know of nothing else to do, let us practice being in community. Through those practices, in small and ordinary ways, Jesus will be revealed among us. Though Jesus' teaching sets the stage for their eventual recognition of him, it was not until they were practicing the very things they learned from him that they recognized him. They invited the stranger. They set the table. They ate together, sharing what they had. All practices of love, hospitality, and generosity are practices of life in community. And that, dear ones, is the Way, and it is our hope for something different than what's in front of us right now. Even though hope seems crazy right now, a story of hope may seem like we are telling our own "idle tale," but tell it anyway. Tell it with the way you live...show the world that hope is alive. This quote by author John Green has inspired me as I've tried to keep hope alive in my own heart and life lately. He wrote, "The amazing thing is that we are right to hold onto hope. The world may be broken, but hope is not crazy."

Hope is not crazy. Knowing that this is not the way the world will always be, and working toward a world that is kinder and more just, is not crazy. Seeing God in all of creation...in trans people, people who use wheelchairs, in autistic people, in children, teenagers, and more experienced folks, is not crazy and talking about that is not an idle tale. It is a story of hope. It is a recognition that the ways of Jesus are alive. Let us tell that story and live that story. Amen.