

Luke 24:13-35

Emmaus

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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 he 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. (NRSV)

At various times in my life, I’ve enjoyed TV shows like Fixer Upper, Design on a Dime, and Extreme Makeover: Home Edition. The premise of shows like this is, in each episode, a house, or certain spaces in a house, are transformed, often without the owners of the house seeing the project until it has been completed. So, at the end of the show there is a big reveal when the owners get to see how cool their house looks. I think that’s the best part of the whole show. It’s fun to see how everything fits together and how each of the homeowners reacts to the transformation.

In some respects, today’s story is like that, it’s a big reveal. Finally, after all of the excitement at the tomb that just left the disciples with questions and deep sadness, Luke’s narrative gives us an encounter with Jesus. You will remember that in the author of Luke’s Easter story, the women left the tomb having encountered sparkling angelic messengers, but not Jesus. In fact, nobody in that part of Luke’s story encountered Jesus at all. That first Easter morning was a pretty intense, scary time for those first Jesus followers.

But, later in the day, two of Jesus’ disciples, Cleopas and an unnamed disciple, left Jerusalem to go to Emmaus, about 7 miles away. As we’ve read Luke’s gospel this winter and early spring, we’ve spent a lot of time on the road with Jesus. Throughout Lent, the time leading up to the Easter season, we were traveling with Jesus and his followers from Galilee to Jerusalem. Again and again, Jesus met people along the road and we saw how encountering Jesus changed them. Luke uses travel as a metaphor for discipleship. This story, found only in Luke, has been called by some, “the journey of every Christian.” Like those first Jesus followers, we all experience times of sadness and hopelessness. And also, like those first followers, as we walk through life, we are given glimpses of hope in moments where we recognize the ways of Jesus in the world and in each other.

The Gospel of Luke was written in the last third of the 1st century for a community of Jesus followers who were still very much under the thumb of Rome. None of the things Jesus talked about had come to pass. They were feeling hopeless in a

time and place where glimpses of the kin-dom of God Jesus talked about were few and far between. Truthfully, we can kind of relate to them, can't we? This story was meant to be good news for a weary community. It can be good news for us too.

As the two disciples walked along, a stranger appeared and asked them what they were talking about. This seemed like a rather bizarre question in light of the events of the last few days. What else would they be talking about? Everyone was talking about this. Does this stranger live under a rock?

What the two were talking about was news, specifically political news. Jesus was crucified and in the Roman Empire crucifixion was deeply political. We can't talk about the life and death of Jesus without talking about politics. We should certainly avoid assigning a particular political party to Jesus, but he spent his life struggling against the oppression of the Roman Empire. That was what they were discussing as they walked along. What were they going to do now? Jesus had been their hope and now their hope was, quite literally, dead. They heard Jesus' tomb was empty, but they either didn't believe it or thought the fact that it was empty was not good news.

The story says this stranger walking along with them was Jesus, but the disciples' eyes were kept from recognizing him. As I thought about that this week, I wondered how often we don't see what's right in front of us or understand what's happening because we think we already see and/or understand. I don't know what tone of voice Cleopas used when he answered Jesus's question about what they were discussing, but I imagine something a little bit condescending as he said, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" In other words, you must be an outsider if you don't know what we know or think like we think.

The disciples went on to tell Jesus his own story, interpreting it as they saw and understood it. Luke, a great storyteller, uses Jesus's response to the disciples' interpretation of events to remind his audience of the words of the prophets regarding the Messiah, noting how Jesus fulfilled the scriptures. The disciples listened to him, but they still didn't understand, and they didn't recognize Jesus in this stranger. The irony...Cleopas criticizing the stranger for being clueless while Cleopas himself was so very clueless.

Human beings have a tendency to do that though. We assume other people don't know as much as we know. We assume the stories we are telling are the truth and therefore we assume the stories told by other people are wrong. Very often we inappropriately elevate education over experiences. And I realize that is a risky thing to say to this highly educated group. But the truth is our diplomas and degrees do not trump the lived experiences of our neighbors.

Here's an example: this week someone I respect and who, I think, had good intentions, posted a graphic on social media with a picture of a shopping cart and the caption: "I don't know one successful person who leaves their cart in the middle of the of the parking lot." Under the picture it said, "If you're too big to do the small things, you're too small to do the big things." There were several people who immediately responded to the post positively.

A little while later, a friend, someone who I trust when it comes to paying attention to voices that are too often silenced, posted a response that outlined why the original post makes an inappropriate assumption about why some people leave their carts in the middle of parking lots. They must just be lazy, right? My friend explained that many people who have mobility challenges simply cannot get the carts they use to a cart corral or back to the store. For us to assume they are not successful based on that is an example of ableism.

I was surprised at the number of people who engaged in the conversation who seemed unwilling to even entertain the idea that the graphic and message of the graphic could be hurtful. I was surprised at how angry people were that someone tried to give voice to the lived experiences of people who deal with chronic pain and other ways in which mobility is hindered. There are a million examples of this that take place on social media and in-person every day. We refuse to accept what is right in front of us because it doesn't match the story we are telling or the truth we have decided is truth.

I imagine Jesus in Luke's story thinking, "Seriously? I'm right here. I am telling you what happened and why and you are like, 'You're an outsider, you can't possibly know what's going on.'" When the trio got to Emmaus, Jesus acted like he was going to continue on (I mean...he was probably eager to get away from those two), but it was late in the day, so the disciples invited him to stay with them. At

least they got that right. Hospitality is a big deal in the Jewish tradition (and therefore in the Christian tradition). Asking the stranger to stay the night was expected.

And now, here is the big reveal. Drum roll please...“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...” In a surprise to absolutely nobody, it was at a table where the outsider was welcomed, that Jesus was recognized...in the outsider himself. Finally, the disciples encountered Jesus once again and finally they got it. Hope was alive in the world. Hope was alive in traveling companions, in stories, in their own hospitality, in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. The disciples responded to this encounter by racing the 7 miles back to Jerusalem to tell the others.

The Gospel of Luke ends with Jesus’s appearance among the disciples in Jerusalem as Cleopas and the other disciple were telling them the story of what they experienced in Emmaus. And then this:

“Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³ and they were continually in the temple blessing God.”

That resurrection day ended way better than it started for Jesus’ first followers. The author of Luke wrote this story for people like us, people who struggle to recognize Jesus in our neighbors, in our families, in the world. But if Easter means anything at all, it has to mean that the things Jesus cared about are still alive in this world, things like love, justice, peace, and compassion. And it has to mean that, as followers of Jesus, we are inspired to always set extra places at the table, where hopefully, we will listen to and understand the stories of the people we are sitting with, and in them, we will encounter Jesus over and over again. After all, it’s the big reveal that is always the best part. Happy Easter!
Amen.