

The Roads We Walk
Luke 24:13-35
June 26, 2022
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Today, we hear a familiar story about two people walking along a road. They are confused and trying to make sense of the world around them. Jesus has just died and risen, but they do not yet know what this means. And so they walk. Seven miles together, along a dusty road from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

The Gospel of Luke takes us on many a winding road. For Luke, roads have a way of bringing us together. A way of connecting followers of Jesus in atypical places, that become symbols of belonging and hope. The beloved story of the Prodigal Son tells us of a child, who *while still far off*, is welcomed home by his father. The Good Samaritan tells us of one, who is beaten and left behind, but on this road, finds healing and hope from someone most unexpected.

And now, on the days immediately following the resurrection, two disciples meet Jesus, finding comfort and assurance of faith. The roads we travel always bring us someplace... to our homes. To our church. To work, or family and friends. Sometimes, these roads are well known and well traveled. So much so, that we can practically journey them with our eyes closed. I imagine this road the disciples walked to Emmaus was familiar to them. But even in the most familiar of places, these roads can surprise us by revealing something new and unexpected.

My family enjoys taking walks together. We pull out the bikes and strollers, the scooters and dog leash and set off on an adventure. Our new home is just around the corner from Theodore Wirth Parkway - and I'm already looking forward to the many walks I'm sure we'll take there. Spring is always my favorite time to walk. The air is fresh and new, the ground around us is coming to life - flowers blooming, water trickling free from ice, the birds singing their own songs of resurrection. Now, when we walk as a family, we don't usually have a destination in mind, but find the process itself to be life giving. Usually the littlest one among us determines the length of our walk. Moving our bodies frees up our minds and hearts to find rest. Racing down the path, our voices and laughter join the sing-song of the birds around us. And usually, our walking opens up conversations, that come at a relaxed pace. The road connects us. To each other, ourselves and community, to nature, and God.

I find myself wondering today, how the roads we walk are revealing something new about God to us in this moment. This is a new season for all of us - a new pastoral team here at Messiah, a new home for my family, and a new rhythm for us all.

And so, I wonder: are we, like the man in the Good Samaritan, waiting for someone to see us and bring healing? Are we, like the Prodigal Son, making our way home, nervously and excitedly? Or are we, like the two walking to Emmaus, hungry for Jesus to bring nourishment and comfort to our hearts? To make clear the way ahead for this new time.

Today, as we walk together, I'm aware of the many questions that fill our minds and hearts. This is my first sermon I offer as your pastor. One of Pastor Tami's first weeks in her new role, and still yet, we are just in the first few Sundays together after Pastor Steve's road took his own detour from Messiah's and makes that glorious and well-earned turn into retirement. There is much excitement here, yet much remains unknown. What will this new road for Messiah reveal? What exciting discoveries will we uncover together? What familiar roads will bring us comfort along the way?

Admittedly, the questions come easier than answers. As is most often true, the answers come in our living, walking, and exploring together. And yet - we have been given promises from Jesus, that Christ will continue to meet us here, on this road and in this place, bringing us what we need. Because Jesus is in the business of meeting our needs, offering *daily bread*, and sustenance for the journey.

Our story today tells about Cleopas and an unnamed companion. It's not uncommon for scripture to leave us wondering the names and identities of various people in stories - and this is no different. One guiding theory, which I happen to like, is that the companion was Cleopas' spouse, Mary, whom the Gospel names as one present at the crucifixion. For any who might find this interesting: Matthew, Mark, and Luke name her Mary, the mother of James. While John calls her Mary, wife of Clopas (variant spelling) - though scholars dating as far back to the second century understand this to be the same woman. It makes sense, of course, that Cleopas and Mary, if together in Jerusalem, would also travel together back home. And just as my own family fills our walks with reflections and conversations of the day - so too, would Cleopas and Mary, reflect on the wonders of Jesus' death and resurrection. Mary was, herself, among those at the tomb, and perhaps was still experiencing an adrenaline rush from the morning, telling and retelling her own beloved what she had seen and heard.

As they are walking, they meet a stranger, who seems to be the only person in all of Jerusalem who knew nothing about the events surrounding Jesus. This stranger in their midst hadn't heard of Jesus' death, nor the accounts of his resurrection just hours before. And, it seemed, he didn't know the aching and longing of the disciples' hearts to meet Jesus again. This man walked with the disciples. He listened to their stories. Their worries. Their hopes. And when they arrived to the house, Cleopas and Mary invited the man in. They gathered around a table, sharing a meal. This was likely not a fancy meal, as they'd just returned home. But probably some preserved meat and crackers, traveling food.

And now, is the point in our story where our senses begin to tingle with hope and remembrance. Because just maybe, around this table, we might see something we've seen before, *and* something all together new. Because if roads, for Luke's gospel are places of connection, then tables and meals are places for miracles. Jesus transformed five pieces of bread and two fish into a feast for thousands. He gathered in the home of Mary and Martha, receiving their hospitality. He shared dinner with Zacchaeus. And at the last supper, Jesus made his body the bread of life. His final meal, a place of promise for miracles and life to come.

And now, at a small table in Emmaus. Jesus again, breaks bread. He gives it to the disciples and offers them a meal of grace and place of belonging. Their eyes are opened, and they see Jesus in their midst. And here, at an ordinary table, filled with folks tired from a long journey - Jesus was revealed to them. Bringing them, not only connection through a long journey, but hope for the future. And, I imagine, all of the wonderings of their heart from the walk along the road, were answered as well. In the breaking of bread. Their hopes for what a risen Christ would mean, their wonderings about what their future as followers of Jesus would be, all the excitement and grief all balled up together... here, broken. Revealed.

Paul says, in his letters to the Romans, that "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us." There is a marked difference between being optimistic and being hopeful. Many can see a glass as half full, and still experience disappointment. We can be optimistic that our lives will change, our health will return, our bank accounts will grow. That the economy will adjust, or we'll make our

career or life goals. We can be optimistic about any number of things. And still, our optimism can meet disappointment.

But hope? Hope is a flower that blooms against all odds. It is the beating of our heart that imagines something more, something impossible, something new. Hope is trust in the assurance that God is here. And even as the roads guide someplace unexpected, they will also be bring us to a place of life and possibility. Just as the road to Emmaus began in wonderings, it ended in revelation of God among us still. Hope is less about *our ideas* dreams for our lives, and more about trusting in God's redeeming work in the world. It's about knowing that even when we fall short, that God forgives. That while we are lost, God seeks us out and carries us home. It's about knowing that even while we do not know the ending, that God holds us in their hands, breathes into us new life, and reveals themselves to us again.

I read a story this week, about a college student named Brooke, who after finding her way our of a dark depression, made a batch of bumper stickers that said, "Please don't take your life today. The world is so much better with you in it. More than you realize, stay." She placed one on her car, with the hope, that someone else would see their lives changed by these words. Days and weeks passed, and she got so accustomed to that sticker on her car, she no longer noticed it as she got in and out of her vehicle. It began to blend into the background, and disappeared from the forefront of her mind. And then one day, she walks out to her car and notices a napkin pinned under her wiper. Pulling it out, she sees a note, written in blue pen, scribbled quickly. And it said: "I left my house with a plan and asked for a sign, any sign, I was doing the right thing when I saw your car in the parking lot. Thank you."

The book of Hebrews reminds us, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." This young woman, placed a bumper sticker on her car - not with optimism, but with hope. Hope that a life she doesn't know, a person she has not seen, will be changed. And then one day, for this stranger, hope arrived. Like Jesus breaking bread at the table, their eyes were opened and they saw the promise of a new life. Assurance that they were not alone, and a new future was in reach.

The thing about hope, the thing about God, is that we learn to live in the unexpected. Trusting that along the road, or at the table, or even in a parking lot... God will break through and reveal something new to us. When have you met Jesus along the road or at a table?

The first time, I heard God calling me to be a pastor, was at a communion table. My parents sent me to Catholic school for elementary, and though I was the only protestant in the school at the time, it was a significant decision in helping guide my way here, to you, today. Every week, we attended mass as a school. And one week, as I listened to Father Kinzer preside over the communion liturgy, chanting – through him, with him, in him, in unity with the holy spirit. All power and glory are yours forever and ever.... I realized, that *someday* I was going to do that, too.

And here I am. I was committed to that dream. I'm about 7 here, dressed as a pastor for Halloween. My mom made my alb from a ghost costume, sewed a stole to match one of my paternal Grandpa's (*a retired Lutheran pastor then*).

Shortly after that mass, I told our principal, Sister Janine, that I was going to be a pastor. Some might expect her to scoff, as women are not pastors in the Catholic Church, or because a 7 year old can't possibly know what they are called to do. But instead, Sister Janine told me she thought I was right and would be a wonderful pastor. Then she promised to be at my ordination.

And she was... Here we are, together on that day. Not only, were my eyes opened in the breaking of the bread. But the people I met along the road, were *always*, encouraging and revealing Christ among us. Sister Janine was not the only person to meet me along the roads I walked. My Grandma and parents, especially, have been of the most important people in my life. Showing me always, how to live in love, how to care for those around you, and let your faith guide your path. Especially when you're not sure of the destination.

My Grandma Johnson turned 101 this last March. She raised my Mom, along with 7 other really incredible people who I'm lucky to call my aunts and uncles. She was a farmer's wife who never worked outside the home. And she would have been an *incredible* pastor. And actually, she was, in a sense. As she ministered to me, and countless others through her life. She and my Grandpa have been for me, and for so many, a tangible sign of Jesus' love. Because if Jesus loves like Grandma loves? Whew. Grandma always said becoming a parent taught her about the depths of God's love. But for me? Even before becoming a parent myself, Grandma was among the first to show me what unconditional love looked like.

And my parents? Paul and Sue. They lived out their faith through their work, seeing their careers as an RN and OTR Truck Driver as vocations, ways to care for others as Jesus cared for them. And most significantly, for me of course, is that they not only supported the dreams of myself and my brother and sister (*who is, btw, here today helping with my boys!*)... but they encouraged us whenever doubting or discouraged. They held me in faith, when I wasn't sure of what came next. They showed me, by their own actions, how to be a people of grace. They walked life's road with me, patiently and lovingly, helping me to see Christ in the midst. As a teen, I had a season of confusion and depression myself, as so many do. In the midst of this time, I was searching for answers and guidance. One Sunday, as the first notes began to play, my Mom leaned over and whispered to me: "*listen, Bethany... these words are for you.*" As we began to sing what has become a favorite hymn, I felt Christ among us, in my own Emmaus moment, and a palpable relief to the burdens I carried. "God sent His son, They called Him Jesus, He came to love, Heal and forgive"

It is because of these people, and countless others, that I stand here today. I have been blessed to meet Jesus in colleagues and professors. In parishoners at each of the five congregations I have served. And in already, in you. I've seen Jesus in the ways you have reached out to welcome me and my family. In hearing accounts of how you cared for ALL those kids at VBC and each other through small groups. I know this is a good and faithful community, who not only walk the roads of life together - but are ready for the surprising ways that Jesus will show up along the way.

One of the reasons I keep returning to this story of Emmaus, is the reminder that we never know just how Christ will be revealed. It might be walking along the road, or at the table. It might be through the encouragement of a bumpersticker, a meal with friends, or the singing of a familiar song. And... it just might be through you.

You could be the one, who reveals the goodness of God to others.
The person who puts out a bumpersticker to remind others they are enough.
The person who encourages a young child who wants to be a pastor.
The one who uses their gifts and careers to embody God's love, wherever they are.

Which reminds me of one last story I want to share, this one is not about me... but takes place in Texas, where graduates of Wiley College were surprised at their ceremony, to learn that an anonymous donor had paid their debts. More than \$300,000 dollars, forgiven. I've no doubt this

announcement was met with an astonished gasp and great joy. A moment of grace that would transform the lives of these students, set free from years of loan repayments, years of struggling to make their meager paychecks cover high rent and food and car loans and, somehow still, their student loans. And instead, they received unexpected grace, a gift of hope in their future. The news article closed saying, “the school’s motto is even more appropriate, *go forth, inspired.*”

And isn’t that the thing about hope? That ultimately, it turns us outward from ourselves and set us free, to go forth, inspired. Inspired to live with confidence that Christ will meet us on the road, or around the table. Inspired to trust the God is here, in this place. And inspired, to go forth and share this message of goodness and hope with a world in need. Because we are a resurrection people who have *seen the Lord*, and know the impact Christ has made on us, and the opportunity for transformation for the world.

The disciples at Emmaus, met Jesus on the road, and had their eyes opened in the breaking of bread. But they didn’t stay at the table. Instead, they got up, they sought out another road, *going forth inspired*, to tell others of what they had seen. Their voices carried the promises of Christ in their midst. Their bodies, their actions, became vessels in which Jesus continued to be present in the world.

And we too, have stories of hope and resurrection to share. Ways we have met Jesus on the road or in the breaking of bread. Our voices, our actions, tell the story, too. For me, my life goals will always be to shine the light of Christ upon my spouse and children, upon my congregation, and upon a world ever hungry for the bread of life and source of love.

It’s taken us a bit more than seven miles to make our way to you. We’ve met many people along the road, in nearly every corner of our beautiful state, and have seen Jesus in surprising and familiar ways. I stand here today, grateful, and hopeful, for the roads we will now walk together.

How will we embody the hope of Christ to a world in need? What roads will we travel, what detours might we try, knowing that Christ is with us always, just waiting to be revealed anew? I for one, cannot wait to discover the roads we’ll walk, and the meals we’ll share together.

Please pray with me, words I have long loved, that seem especially appropriate for today. This is a *prayer for good courage*:

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of June 26, 2022

Weekly Prayer: Lord, I need your presence on the long roads of my life. The road between fear and hope, the road between the place where all is lost and the place of resurrection. Like the disciples walking the road to Emmaus, I need your company. Jesus, stand with me, in your risen power and bless me, dear Lord. Amen.

Monday, June 27

Scripture: Luke 24:13-16, 30-32

On that same day, two disciples were traveling to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking to each other about everything that had happened. While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey. They were prevented from recognizing him.

After he took his seat at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. They said to each other, "Weren't our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?"

Observation: This is the story of two friends walking on the Emmaus road together when the risen Jesus is suddenly with them, although they don't recognize that it is Jesus. They are on a very familiar road, having a not uncommon experience of greeting a stranger. But oh what a surprise this road and this experience becomes! The moment that they recognize Jesus is at the table is when he breaks the bread. They remember what he said would happen. In the breaking of the bread and the blessing of the cup, we remember.

Application: Two friends helped each other recognize the presence of Christ in their midst. Often it is a friend who helps us see and hear more clearly what has happened. Who has been that kind of friend to you? Are you that kind of friend to someone else? This is one of the things that happens in a Faith Group.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, that you do come and enter into the ordinary experiences of our lives. It takes trust to let others into my life so they can help me see where you are present. Help me to identify those persons I can trust. Then help me to be this kind of friend to others. Amen.

Tuesday, June 28

Scripture: Habakkuk 2:1-3

I will take my post;

I will position myself on the fortress.

I will keep watch to see what the Lord says to me
and how he will respond to my complaint.

Then the LORD answered me and said,
Write a vision, and make it plain upon a tablet
so that a runner can read it.

There is still a vision for the appointed time;
it testifies to the end;
it does not deceive.
If it delays, wait for it;
for it is surely coming; it will not be late.

Observation: Habakkuk was a prophet who lived during the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem by the invading Babylonian army. Many times in our lives, we seem to be waiting for a vision to appear to show us God's will. This passage – written from the viewpoint of the prophet – shows us something very important about being people who serve God's vision.

Application: What key lesson do you take from this passage... for yourself? For our church? Have you ever thought of yourself as someone to whom God might entrust a vision?

Prayer: Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. As you spoke to the prophets of old in ways that led them to live boldly for your purposes, so also open my ears and my mind to your voice. Help me to see the greater purpose in the journey that I am living. Amen.

Wednesday, June 29

Scripture: Matthew 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had left the Sadducees speechless, they met together. One of them, a legal expert, tested him. "Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?" He replied, "*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.* All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."

Observation: Most of us are driven or motivated in life by certain desires. We may be motivated by our desire for affirmation, wealth, power, pleasure, love, or recognition. For some there is also a yearning to make a difference. When asked for the greatest commandment, Jesus replied with a statement that summarized the entire Old Testament. What is most important? A relationship with God and one another – a relationship defined by love.

Application: Surely, we were created as human beings with something more in mind than that we simply gain the affirmation of others, experience pleasure, and attain wealth. What do you think God's purpose for human beings is?

Prayer: God, thank you for the words and example of Jesus. In his life, you offer a way for me to live. In the midst of all the desires this world has to offer, keep me centered on your will and your way of unconditional love. Amen.

Thursday, June 30

Scripture: Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:14-16; Matthew 6:31-33; Matthew 18:19-20

He has told you, human one, what is good and
what the LORD requires from you:
to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.

You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

Therefore, don't worry and say, 'What are we going to eat?' or 'What are we going to drink?' or 'What are we going to wear?' Gentiles long for all these things. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. Instead, desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Again I assure you that if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, then my Father who is in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them."

Observation: There are many scriptures that act as summaries of God's mission for us – verses that call us to a purpose or mission greater than ourselves. Micah summarized the proper relationship to God. Jesus provided teaching that could connect us to God's greater purpose.

Application: How do these verses connect with your life purpose or mission? How might you fulfill these verses through your career or family life?
Do other verses come to mind when you think of your life purpose?

Prayer: Show me once again, O God, what you would have me be and to do. Help me to connect my life with your greater purpose. Let others see your light through my words and actions this day. Amen.

Friday, July 1

Scripture: Colossians 1:1-2, 9-14

From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and Timothy our brother. To the holy and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae. Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

Because of this, since the day we heard about you, we haven't stopped praying for you and asking for you to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, with all wisdom and spiritual understanding. We're praying this so that you can live lives that are worthy of the Lord and pleasing to him in every way: by producing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God; by being strengthened through his glorious might so that you endure everything and have patience; and by giving thanks with joy to the Father. He made it so you could take part in the inheritance, in light granted to God's holy people. He rescued us from the control of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. He set us free through the Son and forgave our sins.

Observation: There are ways in which we might speak of the will of God. The first is that in everything we do we seek to honor God and to live in a way that reflects God's love. The second is that in each circumstance God may desire us to make a particular choice. Then there may be times when it isn't the particular choice that matters to God but whether you live justly and honorably. What do you think? How is God involved in your journey?

Application: Five times in Paul's letters he says he is an apostle, "by the will of God." He believed God had called him to this work. Have you ever sensed God's leading? How do we discern the will of God?

Prayer: Lead me, Lord, lead me in your righteousness. Make your way plain before my face. For it is you, Lord, you, Lord only, that makes it possible for me to dwell safely and securely in your presence. Amen.

Saturday, July 2

Scripture: Genesis 12:1-9

The LORD said to Abram, "Leave your land, your family, and your father's household for the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,
those who curse you I will curse;
all the families of the earth
will be blessed because of you.”

Abram left just as the LORD told him, and Lot went with him. Now Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all of their possessions, and those who became members of their household in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Canaan, Abram traveled through the land as far as the sacred place at Shechem, at the oak of Moreh. The Canaanites lived in the land at that time. The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “I give this land to your descendants,” so Abram built an altar there to the LORD who appeared to him. From there he traveled toward the mountains east of Bethel, and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and worshipped in the LORD’s name. Then Abram set out toward the arid southern plain, making and breaking camp as he went.

Observation: Abram (*later God would change his name to Abraham – meaning “father of many nations” – as a symbol of God’s promise*) sensed God calling in a specific direction without knowing the specific destination. To move in God’s direction, Abram would have to abandon everything he had known. Something new lay ahead, but he would have to leave the familiar.

Application: Abram did not go alone. He brought his family with him. Rarely do we travel alone. Others may trust us and come along, or we meet others along the way that encourage or give us direction. They may even provide greater meaning in our journey. Who is someone unexpected that you have met in life and has confirmed for you that your direction is right?

Prayer: God, show me the way that will honor what you want for me. Help me to stay close to you that I may reach all that you have for me in this world and in the world to come. Use me to draw others closer to you. Amen.