

## **The Third Day, Living the Resurrection – 4. Emmaus**

**Luke 24: 13-32**

**March 10, 2024**

**Pastor Tami Luckhardt**

Two disciples were walking from Jerusalem back to Emmaus on that first Easter morning. They were talking over the events of the last few days, specifically, the death of Jesus, the talk/rumors of his resurrection. They didn't seem to know what to make of it all. As they walked, their disappointment diminished their hope because it was impossible for them to see that God was still with them. Even as he literally came alongside them and walked and talked with them. And the same can be true for us. Our own disappointments can diminish our hope and impair our ability to see God with us. If you are someone who has ever lost hope, today's message is for you.

During this Lenten season here at Messiah Church, we are observing mini-Easters each Sunday as we look at resurrection encounters of those who were closest to Jesus. We started with the story of Mary Magdalene who went to the tomb and found it empty. And when she ran to tell the other disciples, they didn't believe her. Jesus' own disciples didn't believe her! Then when Jesus appeared to the disciples, except for Thomas. So when one of the disciples went and told Thomas that Jesus was alive, Thomas said, *I can't believe that until I see for myself.* If you are skeptical about the resurrection, you are in good company. Jesus' own disciples were among those who didn't believe in the resurrection to begin with. At one point, there were over 500 people who saw Jesus alive after his resurrection but even knowing that it can be a hard thing to believe because the story of the resurrection is disruptive to what we know, our fixed mindsets. But Christ is making all things new and waiting for us to see him in the world and then for us to go into the world and do his will.

Today's story is about one of those resurrection encounters with a couple of Jesus' disciples. Now these two were not a part of the original 12 disciples. Scholars believe that there were 72 other disciples that Jesus sent out to do his work. These were probably among those 72. One of them we know is named Cleopas and the other has no name although scholars have come to believe it might have been Cleopas' wife, Mary. These two people gave up everything to follow Jesus. They left their jobs, their homes, their families because they believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and so they decided to follow him.

They had gone to Jerusalem excited about what might happen but that day instead, Jesus was arrested, beaten, sentenced to death and a crown of thorns was placed upon his head. He was stripped naked and hung on a cross. This is what they watched on that Friday. They watched him be crucified and then hang there for six hours, slowly suffocating to death. That's how you die on a cross. The weight of his body hanging there crushed his lungs until he couldn't breathe. Then they watched the Roman guards take down his body and place it in a tomb. Then they spent Friday night and all day Saturday in shock.

I'm guessing we've all experienced a tragic death of someone we know and love. And when that happens we say, "I just can't believe it. I just can't believe they're gone." This is what is happening on Saturday and by Sunday morning, the reality begins to set in, and these two disciples decide there is nothing left for them in Jerusalem. No reason to stay there. I guess we'll go back to our homes, back to the old life that we had before we met Jesus. Even though that morning a couple of women came to the disciples and told them that Jesus was alive, they didn't believe it. So later on that afternoon, they decided to make their way back to Emmaus.

And here's where our scripture picks up. *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.* This 7 mile journey would have taken about 2 hours. This would be like the time it takes for you to drive from Messiah Church to Duluth. So, they have a good amount of time to talk about their disappointment and disillusionment. They just can't believe he is gone. And somewhere along the way, perhaps one of them says, *How could God let this happen? If there really is a God, why did this happen?*

Biblical scholar, William Barclay translates Luke 24 by saying that *their faces were twisted with grief.* Can you imagine that? I bet many of you can because every single one of us is going to take our journey to Emmaus one day. We will take a journey where our faces are twisted in grief, a journey in which the world seems to be crumbling around us. We have no hope, only despair. And we ask the same question, if there is a God, then how did this happen?

For some of you, your journey to Emmaus is a walk to the unemployment line. How can I be 50 years old and find myself unemployed? How did this happen? Or for others of you it's the walk away from the doctor's office after you've received a diagnosis that terrifies you. That's your journey to Emmaus. For some of you, it's when you leave the courthouse and your marriage has been dissolved and you make your way back to a big empty house and wonder, how am I going to do this by myself? I remember when my brother was addicted to drugs and homeless for over 20 years and how our family, especially my parents, mourned the loss of our dreams for their him. All of us will walk on our journey to Emmaus one day.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, taught that God's grace is prevenient. Prevenient grace is a fancy term but to keep it simple, it is "grace before we know we need it." I have this image of the circus and the trapeze artists, and they're doing these incredible things way up high and it's dangerous. Sometimes they begin to fall and there's a net there. Life is like that. Sometimes as people, we begin to fall. And through prevenient grace, we are caught up in the net of God's care. John Wesley understood this grace. It is this grace that was so compelling for him that he shared with the whole world, and it reaches out even to us today.

Author Tom Berlin says that this grace always requires God's invitation because disappointment leaves us with a spiritual blind spot. When life is good, we can see the ways the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives. But when times are difficult and hope fades, it can be easy to assume the worst about God, feel that we are not loved or that God does not care about our situation. This past Sunday, Jerry and I had plans to have dinner with some of our very dear friends who are really like parents to us. For today's purposes, I am going to call them Bill and Joyce. But on the way to meet us for dinner, Bill began experiencing slurred speech and partial paralysis on the right side of his face. Jerry and I were able to drive them to the hospital, which was only 8 minutes away. Once we arrived there, we called Bill's daughter, who was amazingly enough just a mile away having dinner. So, she was able to get to the hospital very quickly to see her dad. It was while Bill was under the care of the ER medical team that he suffered a stroke. Bill is still in the hospital and treatment plans are still being discussed. They are still on their journey to Emmaus. And as I reflect on the events of that day, meeting Bill and Joyce at the time of his first episode, getting him to the ER in 8 minutes, his daughter being just minutes away and most of all, him being in the ER when the stroke occurred, some might say they were lucky but I see God's prevenient grace at work and how Bill and Joyce were caught in the net of God's care.

When our hope fades, so does our capacity to recognize God's presence with us but the Bible continually affirms that God is present with us, especially in our times of greatest need. But if the message of the Incarnation/the Birth of Jesus is Emmauel, *God with us*, then the message of

the Resurrection is that *God is always with us*. The doctrine of prevenient grace is dependent on the Resurrection because it is only when we recognize that Christ is with us, just as he was with the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, that our hope is restored.

The next thing I want us to notice about our story today is how Jesus comes to these two disciples. *While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey. They were prevented from recognizing him.* I love this. So, they are walking for two hours with this stranger and yet, their eyes were kept from recognizing him. There was nothing wrong with their eyes. They didn't have a sight problem. They had a mindset problem. They didn't recognize Jesus because they weren't expecting to see Jesus.

I imagine Jesus doing this little jog to catch up with them and then asks, *why do you look so sad?* So, they ask him, *are you the only one who doesn't know about Jesus of Nazareth? He was an innocent man whom we thought was the Redeemer of Israel, but they crucified him. And now he'd dead and so is our hope.*

At this point, Jesus could have very easily have said, *hey look guys, it's me, Jesus!* But he doesn't do that. Instead, as they walk and talk, eventually the small talk becomes big talk, as sometimes happens among fellow travelers. They discuss this Jesus, who has died, and - some say - has been raised from the dead. And he begins to review for them their history from the Hebrew Scriptures starting with Moses and goes through all the prophets and in each place, he shows them *why* the Messiah must suffer and die. Jesus doesn't change what happened. As far as they know, Jesus is still in the tomb or his body has been stolen, they aren't sure. But Jesus changes their perspective on the situation, he helps them see that maybe God is at work through this. Maybe all is not lost. Maybe there is hope on the other side of this death.

And this is what Jesus does in our lives too. He doesn't fix everything. He doesn't instantly remove the cancer, restore your loved one's memory, or heal a broken relationship. He doesn't instantly fix all that. We know he can perform miracles; we see it throughout the Gospels more often what he does, is change our perspective on our situation. And so that can we dare to ask, what might happen now? How can God use this situation for good? What might God do through this? God changes how we see the world. And what happens to these two disciples is that their hearts begin to be lifted, moving them from despair to hope. They begin to see the possibility that maybe God is at work and is going to do something good through this horrible tragedy.

That takes us to the last part of the story. *When they came to Emmaus, he acted as if he was going on ahead. But they urged him, saying, "Stay with us. It's nearly evening, and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.* Picture this. They've walked for 2 hours and finally arrived at their home. The sun is setting, and Jesus apparently says something like, "See you all later. It's been a pleasure visiting you. God bless," with plans to walk on down the road. Have you ever asked yourself where he was going to go? Was he really going to walk on? Of course not. I think he is testing the disciples to see if even after his death if they will continue to practice the things he has taught them. And what were those things? To love God with all your heart soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus taught this in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. In Matthew 25 he says, on the last day of the last judgment, the king will gather all the human race together and he will separate them as he separates the sheep from the goats. And he'll take the goats and put them on his left and he'll take the sheep and put them on his right and then he'll dismiss the goats.

But the sheep, he will invite into his Father's kingdom. So, what is the criteria in which one becomes a sheep and is invited into God's kingdom? Jesus says this, *Listen, for I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothing. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him, Lord when was it we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you? Or naked and gave you clothing? Or sick or imprisoned and visited you? And the king will answer. Truly I tell you, in as much as you did it to the least of the members of my family, you did it to me.*

Here was a stranger who has had nothing to eat or drink, no place to stop and rest. Will they invite him in or let him go on? The dramatic heart of this story is, of course, the moment of recognition; when he takes the bread and gives thanks to God, breaks it and gives it to them.... *"and their eyes were opened, and they recognized him."* In that single moment in time, as he stands there, the two halves of the broken bread balanced in his upturned palms, he becomes known to them. Through the remembrance of the Passover meal that they had shared just a few days earlier, the eyes of their hearts were opened. What would have happened if they had let him go? They would not have seen the risen Christ. They only saw that it was Jesus when they welcomed the stranger.

So how are we, Messiah Church, practicing the things that Jesus taught us? How are we loving God and neighbor? I want to share with you just a few of the ways we are doing that just this month. One is through your giving to our Easter Offering recipients which are the Shirley Robinson Scholarship Foundation that provides tuition support for families of Bloom and the other is to support to our area food shelves, providing food for those who are hungry.

In support of this, for the past 6 years, sisters Emily and Ashley have hosted the Cocoa Cafe in the driveway of their home. To date, they have raised a total of \$18,000 and this coming weekend, March 16, 2024, you can visit the 7th annual Cocoa Cafe again and support Em and Ashley's efforts to feed hungry people. For their address, contact their mom, Miranda. Her email is [mspence @messiahchurch.org](mailto:mspence@messiahchurch.org).

Another way that we're living into loving God and neighbor is the commissioning of our 6th mission team next month, that will serve the people on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. While there, our team will make and deliver beds to children/adults on the reservation. It's hard to imagine that there are adults and children living less than 8 hours from here who have never had a bed to sleep on. There is such a sense of warmth and purpose in delivering those beds. When we do this kind of work, providing beds and scholarships for low-income families and food for the food shelves right here in our own communities, we feel fully alive. You know, this is one of the secrets to good mental health and wellness that you cannot buy on Amazon or at Ridgedale Mall. When you give your time, talents, and resources to someone in need, you experience what feels like to be fully alive. You find hope and joy and what it feels like to experience the risen Christ.

So, are you expecting to see Jesus? And when you do, will you let him go by or will you stop to help him? Because here is what I know. When we do what Jesus said, we welcome the stranger, care for the hungry and thirsty, naked, sick, and imprisoned, we actually meet Jesus there. We have an encounter with the Risen Christ.

How has the living Christ opened your eyes to possibilities that are different from your past? What is Jesus trying to have you see right now?

Let's pray: Loving Jesus, thank you for your holy meal which enables us to encounter your presence every time we come to your table of grace. Open our eyes to your presence in the midst of our daily lives so that we are continually renewed by the hope of the Resurrection. In your holy name we pray, Amen.

## **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of March 10, 2024**

### **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, March 11**

#### **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 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 people I can trust. Then help me to be this kind of friend to others. Amen.

### **Tuesday, March 12**

#### **Scripture: Luke 24:13-35**

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. He said to them, "What are you talking about as you walk

along?” They stopped, their faces downcast. The one named Cleopas replied, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who is unaware of the things that have taken place there over the last few days?” He said to them, “What things?” They said to him, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth. Because of his powerful deeds and words, he was recognized by God and all the people as a prophet. But our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel. All these things happened three days ago. But there’s more: Some women from our group have left us stunned. They went to the tomb early this morning and didn’t find his body. They came to us saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who told them he is alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women said. They didn’t see him.” Then Jesus said to them, “You foolish people! Your dull minds keep you from believing all that the prophets talked about. Wasn’t it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then he interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets. When they came to Emmaus, he acted as if he was going on ahead. But they urged him, saying, “Stay with us. It’s nearly evening, and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. 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?” They got up right then and returned to Jerusalem. They found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying to each other, “The Lord really has risen! He appeared to Simon!” Then the two disciples described what had happened along the road and how Jesus was made known to them as he broke the bread.

### **Observation**

To human eyes, the crucifixion had ended everything. The two disciples “had hoped” Jesus was the promised redeemer (but apparently, their words implied, he wasn’t). Jesus, again unrecognized at first, explained to them how the Scriptures pointed to him. When he, although a guest, took the host role, broke the bread, and blessed it, they recognized him.

### **Application**

It seems likely that Cleopas, who was there, told Luke this story. Unrecognized, Jesus asked, “What are you discussing...?” They shared their dashed hopes, confusion, and the ray of hope the “empty tomb” reports evoked. Does this testimony ring true to you? How does the first-hand flavor of the resurrection stories help you trust their integrity?

### **Prayer**

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. 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, March 13**

#### **Scripture: Luke 24:44-49**

Jesus said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. He said to them, “This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Look, I’m sending to you what my Father promised, but you are to stay in the city until you have been furnished with heavenly power.”

### **Observation**

As he did on the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained the Scriptures to all the disciples. He taught them to reflect on the big picture of Israel's history from Moses to the Psalms, to see that in the Christ (anointed one) there is salvation and justice. That was more than just information. He commissioned them to share his message of repentance and forgiveness of sins. "You are witnesses," he said, promising that God's power would help them spread his message to all nations.

### **Application**

Your personal story of a changed heart and life is powerful to the non-religious and nominally religious people you interact with wherever you live, work, or play. You are a disciple, and like the first disciples, are a witness to God's life-changing work through Jesus Christ. In what ways can you share your personal story of a changed heart and life with those who know you?

### **Prayer**

God, keep me alert for chances to faithfully share your story. Give me courage when afraid, confidence when unsure, patience when anxious and passion when indifferent. Help me share my personal story of a changed heart and life. Amen.

## **Thursday, March 14**

### **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 to 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.

## **Friday, March 15**

### **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.

### **Saturday, March 16**

#### **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 so 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.