

**Devotion:** Thursday, April 29, 2020

Luke 24:13-25

<sup>13</sup> Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup> As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup> but they were kept from recognizing him.

<sup>17</sup> He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup> One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

<sup>19</sup> “What things?” he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup> The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup> but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. <sup>22</sup> In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup> but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup> Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

<sup>25</sup> He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

<sup>28</sup> As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup> But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

<sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

<sup>33</sup> They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together <sup>34</sup> and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” <sup>35</sup> Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

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I’ve always liked Luke’s account of Jesus revealing himself to Cleopas and his partner at a dinner table in Emmaus. Here’s a sneaky Messiah at his best. There’s joy when sadness and discouragement give way to surprise and reorientation. Jesus has a secret too good to keep to himself. He gets to let these two disheartened friends in on it.

Watching them scurry out of Jerusalem with heads hung low, fearing for their lives—all of it might make the horror of what had happened on Good Friday more real to Jesus. I’m sure it made the final reveal all the more delightful for him.

But now, it feels like a cruel joke, reading this passage during this Pandemic Easter season. There's not much joy in the air, especially among those who are already up to their chins in the rising waters of economic misery. Luke's resurrection tale sounds like a distant fantasy, containing too many activities that we cannot enjoy right now, including travel and meeting and eating with strangers.

Preachers, all over the country are doing their best to talk about the nurturing power of community and the glory of encountering Christ through generosity and hospitality, all the while staring straight into the cold eye of a webcam. Listeners already isolated at home or hanging at the end of a rope in a quarantined household will wonder where the good news for them resides in a story like this. It all looks so ... outdated.

The challenge for the church is bigger than the fact that too many of us and our neighbors are growing increasingly tired, frustrated, scared, lonely, sad, and broke. The challenge for the church in our Pandemic Easter is in leading people to recognize the risen Christ at a time when one of our key settings for doing so—a common life—has been taken away for an unknown time.

As we have traveled out of the desolation and sadness of Holy Week, the confident Easter choruses of joy, triumph, defiance, belonging usually lead us to assume that resurrection means the end of disappointment. Everyone's supposed to smile and shout, "He is risen indeed." But Easter faith can be both a resurrection hope and an unhappy restlessness at the same time.

I think many of you know that our current isolation, while good for saving lives, still feels unnatural and worthy of a little sadness. Some of you think it's been the greatest challenge of your time. It's OK to admit that to yourself, to your friends, and to God.

Going back to the story, I'm so glad that Jesus doesn't reveal himself to Cleopas and his companion right away but waits. Why does he wait? Jesus is neither testing, scolding, nor humiliating the shell-shocked couple. He is, literally, journeying with them. There he is, present, as they talk about their disappointment and confusion. He does not cut them off. He knows that explanations will not cure their foolishness and slowness to believe.

The time will come to redirect his friends, but first he lets them proceed one heavy step after another.

Getting over a sadness takes time. And sometimes sadness is the journey that leads us to recognition and new life.

That new life walks alongside us, patiently, whether we know it or not.

Let us pray:

*How grateful we are, O God, that, no matter where we are on our journey with you, we can turn to you in prayer. We offer our thankfulness that you are with us as.*

*Some of us are struggling with meaninglessness as we travel on the road of life; others struggle with issues of health and caregiving. Some struggle with relationships, while others struggle with loneliness. Some are desperate as they search for a job, while others complain about the job they have. Some struggle with resentment, while others speak before they think, and act without a thought for how others feel.*

*Whatever it is we struggle with, prayer is the safe place to surrender and let go of the struggle. Grant us the courage to let go of the outcome, and release our burdens to you, O God, that we might walk the road of life with a lighter step as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus the Christ who walks with us. Amen.*

Stay healthy my friends

Pastor Jack