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Luke 24:13-35

Easter Message

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THE EMMAUS JOURNEY

EASTER MESSAGE

Today the church remembers, proclaims, and rejoices in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the victory that God has claimed over sin and death. The resurrection means that darkness and evil have been conquered and no longer have control. The resurrection means that we can have hope and confidence in all seasons because Jesus is alive and ever present. As the team just sang:

Look what Mercy's overcome
 Death has lost and Love has won
 Alive! Alive!
 Hallelujah, Risen Lord

In his poem, *Easter*, George Herbert begins with these words:

Rise heart; thy Lord is risen. Sing his praise
 Without delays,
 Who takes thee by the hand, that thou likewise
 With him mayst rise:
 That, as his death calcined thee to dust,
 His life may make thee gold, and much more, just.¹

The death and resurrection of Jesus means that, like Christ, we die, we are burned, reduced to dust but we also rise with him to walk in newness of life.

What strikes me is how unspectacular and subtle the resurrection story unfolds. If we were in charge we would have designed a production like halftime at the Super Bowl with millions and millions of people looking on. But God didn't do that. The reality of the resurrection begins with an empty tomb and then a gradual understanding by confused and fearful disciples who had given up all hope. This is what we see in the three resurrection scenes in Luke's gospel.

Luke 24 begins with the women coming to the tomb and finding it empty. The second scene is the appearance of Jesus to two disciples on the road to Emmaus and the third is an appearance to the disciples in Jerusalem. This morning I want to talk briefly about the second scene, the Emmaus journey, before we hear a personal Emmaus story. Luke is the only gospel that records this beautiful account.

The Meeting

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. (Luke 24:13-16 ESV)

Two of Jesus' disciples are leaving Jerusalem and apparently heading home to a village by the name of Emmaus, a journey

of seven miles. Jesus was dead and in their minds all has been lost. One of them, we find out, is named Cleopas; the other is unknown. Some believe that the other person is Cleopas' wife. Clearly they are not part of the Eleven; they are two of those with the Eleven mentioned in verse 9.

The two disciples are having an intense discussion about the events of the last three days when Jesus suddenly joins them on the road. However, they do not recognize or know him. Jesus had a real body, but it was a resurrected body, a transformed body. What the Jews expected to receive in the age to come had already happened for Jesus. The inability to recognize Jesus is a common feature in his post resurrection appearances.

I don't know if you have had this type of experience, but a few years ago my wife and I were spending a night in Carmel the weekend of the Masters golf tournament. After checking in I was watching a bit of the golf in the lobby. There was a man sitting behind me and he seemed strangely familiar. We struck up a conversation talking about the golf we were watching. After a while it suddenly dawned on who this man was. I turned around and said, "You're Reggie Jackson." He said, "You must be a detective." Reggie Jackson was a hall of fame baseball player for the Oakland A's and New York Yankees. I had been talking to him without knowing him. This is the situation with the two disciples. They saw Jesus but did not really see him. Like the disciples we too can be spiritually unaware, blind to the appearance of Jesus in our midst.

The Conversation

And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" (Luke 24:17-18)

Jesus engages the two disciples in conversation. Cleopas responds with extreme surprise that anyone would not be aware of the very public events of Jesus' arrest, trial, and execution. "Are you the only one?" Clearly the two disciples are disappointed and grieving because they are sad faced.

And he said to them, "What things?"

And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. 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 happened. (Luke 24:19-21)

Jesus asks another question and the two disciples summarize what has transpired. They tell the stranger about Jesus, a prophet mighty in deed and word, which squares with how people perceived Jesus. They blame the Jewish leadership, not the Romans, for the death of Jesus; the chief priests and rulers were the ones who delivered him up and handed him over to be crucified.

We learn that the disciples had hoped that Jesus would redeem Israel and would set them free from political oppression. They saw redemption as both physical and political. But now with Jesus' death, their hopes had come to ruins. Thus, the sad faces. They had given up hope and were returning home, trying to understand what had happened and how things had gone so horribly wrong.

Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." (Luke 24:22-24)

The two disciples continue the story. Some women went with spices to the tomb, found the tomb empty, and had an encounter with an angel who told them Jesus was alive. When the women reported what had happened to the disciples, their report was dismissed as silly talk or nonsense (Luke 24.11). If you wanted to make up a believable story about the resurrection you would never have chosen women to be the first witnesses because in this culture, women were not credible witnesses.

After the women reported the encounter with an angel, some of the disciples went to the tomb and they also found it empty. But they did not see Jesus either. The two travelers to Emmaus were amazed at the report but they were not convinced. They were perplexed and doubting. Again, if you were to make up a story to convince people of the resurrection you would have had Jesus' followers confident and certain in regards to the resurrection rather than confused and shaken.

And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27)

Jesus responds with disappointment and a rebuke similar to how the angel had responded to the women in the first scene of chapter 24. To the Emmaus travelers he says that it was necessary that the Christ should suffer, something he will repeat to the Eleven in Jerusalem: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead." (Luke 24:46) In each of the three scenes in this chapter Luke uses a little word meaning "must" or "it was necessary."

"...the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." (Luke 24:7)

"Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26)

"...everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." (Luke 24:44)

Jesus had to be delivered over, he had to suffer, and he had to fulfill "all" that Scripture said about him. This is the key to chapter 24 and a major point for Luke's gospel. Luke is validating that Jesus must be the Messiah because he is the one who fulfills Scripture. Jesus himself had warned the disciples as to what would happen.

"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (Luke 9:22)

"The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men." But they did not understand this saying. (Luke 9:44-45)

And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." But they understood none of these things. (Luke 18:31-34)

The disciples had heard Jesus but did not understand. They had read Scripture but did not understand. They are slow-hearted and foolish. This was because they were naïve and unsuspecting. Their confusion reveals that they did not expect a suffering Messiah and they did not expect the resurrection; they should have if they had read their Scriptures carefully. And so Jesus has a serious Bible study with them that entails the entire Old Testament. He begins with Moses, the first five books of the Old Testament, and goes through "all" the Prophets and all the Scripture. This was a comprehensive study.

What a Bible study that must have been? Certainly he would have talked about the "prophet like Moses" from Deut. 18; as well as the greater son of David; the servant songs of Isaiah, in particular Isaiah 53; and David's expressions of lament that looked forward to him, like Psalm 22. What Luke implies is that the entire sacrificial system of Israel and all the stories of the OT point to Jesus in one way or another—the sacrifice of Isaac, the story of Jonah, lessons from Job, and on and on. In the next scene that takes place in Jerusalem Jesus will do the same thing: "Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." (Luke 24:46)

Jesus had to reorient the thinking of the disciples and base their understanding of the kingdom of God and the Messiah not on what they wanted but on what Scripture said. This is often our journey as well. We create the kind of God we want and often that excludes any idea of suffering. We want the glory and resurrection without the dying and suffering. We want the victorious Messiah that allows us to conquer in the political-physical sense. But often it is necessary for us to suffer before we experience resurrection. When things don't go according to our expectations we have to go back to Scripture over and over again in order to correct our thinking and see the resurrected Jesus in our life.

The Meal

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (Luke 24:28-32)

When the trio arrives at the village where the two are going, Jesus acts like he is going farther. But the disciples are riveted with what Jesus is saying and they want to spend more time with him. In addition, the day is almost over and it may have been unsafe to travel at night, so the two invite Jesus to stay with them.

While they are having a meal together, Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. The stranger who is the guest suddenly becomes the host. The language recalls the feeding of the 5000 and the last supper. The main action verb is the word “bless.” Perhaps Jesus used the Jewish blessing: “blessed are you Lord God, king of the cosmos, who brings forth bread from the earth.” The two disciples had heard Jesus give this blessing on many an occasion as they sat around the table with Jesus. And suddenly the disciples see and know. They see that the one giving the bread is the Bread of life.

Jesus vanishes, becomes invisible, the two disciples share with each other how the Word of God had burned within them as Jesus explained the Scriptures. Then they hurry back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples.

Caravaggio painted this scene twice. This particular painting shows the disciples at the moment of recognition, the ah-ha moment. The two men are coming up out of their chairs but their eyes are fixed upon the hands of Jesus and the bread. Perhaps they saw the nail marks on Jesus’ hands. Jesus seems to be leaning out from the darkness into the light. His arms are extended outward with a welcoming gesture. There is an open place at the table. Jesus is inviting us to join him. Seeing the resurrection happens in an ordinary house over an ordinary meal.

The Emmaus journey becomes a template, or pattern, for how we come to see and recognize Jesus. The Emmaus journey is the journey into the ever-deepening reality of the resurrection. It is the journey from confusion and doubt to certainty and assurance, from broken dreams to unimaginable hopes, from physical sight to invisible awareness, from mental knowing to hearts burning. The Emmaus journey is the journey into the room of love where we experience an innermost inwardness with the one who first loved us; it is the movement into a different place and space where we behold clearly what was right before our eyes the whole time. The Emmaus journey is a journey of revelation, of having our eyes opened to see the truth of Jesus and the truth of Scripture, an “ah-ha” moment when we grasp Jesus in a subtle but life-changing way.

For many of us the Emmaus journey can describe our conversion experience, but it can also describe how we come to

recognize and know Jesus in a more meaningful and fuller way as a believer. Sometimes we think that an encounter with Jesus has to be some dramatic moment. But the Emmaus journey tells us that more likely our journey deepens in the midst of ordinary life, walking on the road when a stranger joins us or sitting at the table when someone blesses the meal and we receive the bread of life.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, had an Emmaus experience. Upon returning home from a difficult mission trip, he questioned his faith and was ready to give up the ministry. But in 1738, at the age of 34, John Wesley attended an evening worship service in London which moved him deeply. Wesley described his experience in his journal:¹

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while the leader was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.²

Jonathan Edwards had an Emmaus experience in 1737. While riding his horse in the woods, he dismounted for a time of contemplation and prayer and was overcome with a vision of the glory of Christ:

I had a view, that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God; as mediator between God and man; and his wonderful, great, full, pure, and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared so calm and sweet appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception – which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me, the bigger part of the time, in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud.³

But the Emmaus journey is not just for a few, it is for all of us. Jesus has risen. He is alive. We see him in the breaking of bread and we receive life. We hear him in the Scriptures and our hearts are warmed. We walk with him on the Emmaus road and he takes us to a deeper awareness of his presence.

The Day of Resurrection has dawned upon us, the day of true light and life, wherein Christ, the life of believers, arose from the dead. Let us give abundant thanks and praise to God, that while we solemnly celebrate the day of our Lord’s resurrection, he may be pleased to bestow on us quiet peace and special gladness; so that being protected from morning to night by his favoring mercy, we may rejoice in the gift of our Redeemer. Amen. (Mozarabic Sacramentary)

1. George Herbert, *The Complete English Poems*, (Penguin Books, London, 1991), 37

2. <http://www.gbgm-umc.org/aldersgate-wheaton/aumcname.html>.

3. Jonathan Edwards, *A New Biography*, Iain H. Murray, (Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1987), 100.

