

“Their Eyes Were Opened”

Luke 24:13-35, Easter 3A, April 10, 2005
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Luke 24:13-35

¹³Now on that sameday two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then 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?” ¹⁹He 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, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But 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. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and 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. ²⁴Some 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.” ²⁵Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But 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. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They 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?” ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Prayer.

I've always thought of myself as a pretty bright guy. So it's immensely humbling when I

learn just how little I truly know.

I grew up with good schools and was always in the top five or ten percent of my class. I took the regents route to graduation, was inducted into the National Honor Society, and ended with a 92 average. I went off to school to Clarkson, up north, in Potsdam, NY in the St. Lawrence valley. I went to Clarkson to become an engineer, a chemical engineer, where my dreams were of working for a big chemical company, making lots of money, mixing compounds, calculating flow capacities, and walking around looking important in a white hard hat.

I quickly learned at Clarkson just how little I knew, and was it ever humbling. Half the students were either the valedictorians or salutatorians of their high school class, $\frac{3}{4}$ had earned Advanced Placement credits while in high school, and every single one of them would cut my throat to score a better grade than me on an exam, including my freshman room-mate. You want to talk about competition? Brilliant students made the Division I hockey team look like pee-wees. The advanced concepts of science and technology were only a thin shadow of what I learned in my high school days. I recall completing my final exam in an electrical engineering class and earning a good grade in it, yet walking away thinking to myself that *I didn't have the first idea what an electrical transistor was, let alone how to create or maintain one.*

It's humbling to look at something you should know, and you just can't see it, you can't recognize what should be obvious.

For me, this is true when I'm around musicians. Either you get it, or you just never will. Either a person has a moment when a page of sheet music brings understanding, feeling, flavor and tone, or it's impossible to see anything other than little F – A – C – E penciled in as a reminder in the treble clef. And just why is it necessary to have different clefs and times? Instruments created in different keys? And just why isn't there one flat and one sharp for every whole note, such that the piano keyboard would be in perfect symmetry?

I can look at sheet music and make a relative interpretation of what something might sound like. But I'll never get it. My cognitive self has a blind spot when it comes to instrumental music. There is no tempo that just comes natural to my soul, no sound that I instinctively know is a perfect C, no deeper or more profound understanding of a movement, why it is, or where it is going.

Think about it: how many of us could pick up the sheet music for “The Old Rugged Cross” that had everything printed on it, *with the exception of the words*; how many of us could look at that and recognize that it was the music to one of our most cherished and beloved hymns?

The disciples had been meeting and traveling with Jesus on a daily basis for the previous three years- THREE YEARS, people. They had become fast friends, eager to please their master, their teacher, their rabbi, and their leader. My gracious, they had just shared a meal together with Jesus the evening before his murder. But they had seen him killed and buried in a tomb. And that is what gave them a blind spot to recognizing Jesus on that road to

Emmaus. His gruesome death served as a critical incident in their lives, that without this encounter, they would have never been able to get over or erase from their memories.

The disciples had talked the line. They had talked about faith with Jesus. He had taught them all, and spelled out quite clearly what He expected of them after He was gone. He had healed right before their eyes, hundreds, possibly thousands of people. Gracious, he had even risen the dead right in front of them, not just once, but many times over- Lazarus (John 11), the daughter of the leader of the synagogue, the widow's son (Luke 7), and Jairus' daughter (Mark 5), just to name a few- and that's only those that are mentioned. Jesus even told them that he would be raised from the dead. But seeing him hang and die on that cross just three days earlier would have painted over the looking glass in their minds; created a blind spot that would take something short of a miracle for them to overcome.

Jesus was dead; and it was as simple as that. Oh, yes of course, there was the story from the women, the two travelers even reported it to their anonymous and mysterious partner. The women had gone to the tomb to prepare his body, but it wasn't there. "They didn't see him." (Luke 24:24b) So they must have just jumped to conclusions, and made the mental leap to the all-too-obvious deduction: someone probably stole His body. Just because someone tells you they are going to return from the dead certainly doesn't make it so, you-know-what-I-mean?

What a blind spot.

Bishop Willimon writes, "Our modern ways of thinking are enlisted in service of our disbelief. We are blinded by our modern prejudices and preconceptions to the presence of Christ. But yet, because of his love for us, the risen Christ comes to us, walks with us, and we are given the way to faith." (William H. Willimon, *Pulpit Resources*, April 10, 2005.) All those things that make us unique, diverse, and colored beautiful are also all those things that erect blind spots in our lives, that prevent us from seeing and experiencing the Savior that comes to walk among us.

We will never fully know how anyone else perceives the world. We can only make educated guesses at someone else's cognition, or perception, or understanding of their reality. In many ways, we walk similar paths, but in the vast majority of circumstances our journey of faith is uniquely our own. Culture, gender, race, and socioeconomic causes us to be blinded to what others naturally see. Sexual orientation, faith tradition, and history of experiencing God all obscure our ability to recognize the One who stands before us. Prejudices, customs, traditions and biases all interfere with our ability to know the Savior who walks with us on the way.

The disciples couldn't even recognize Jesus when he interpreted the scriptures for them. How bad is that?!!! For the two disciples, *it took Jesus taking the bread, giving thanks over it, breaking the bread, and giving it to them before they were able to recognize who he was.*

No matter how hard I may try, I will never know – fully know – the weight of the cross that you are bearing. I can't know your family thoroughly enough, your life experience, your

gifts, or all those things that make you uniquely you. But what I can do for you is to offer you the assurance that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, that He loves you so much, that, like those disciples we hear about today, He loves you so much that Jesus chooses to walk with you. He makes you and me *His business*, to walk with us through every stage of our lives, through every valley, and over every peak. Jesus loves us so much that *He chooses to be present with us even when we have no recognition of Him*. ... even when we have no recognition of Him.

He's with us even when we think that it isn't so, when we don't recognize Him for who He really is, even when there are no others who could possibly be mistaken for Him. *Even when we are all alone, Christ loves us enough to never leave us.*

My beloved, there is a lot of Good News as a result of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. There is the Good News that your sins have been paid for, you and I, our slate has been wiped clean. There is the Good News that by His victory over the grave, that now all of us have been given the gift of eternal life. And today, there is the Good News that Christ loves each of us so much, that He has broken into our world, to walk with us, even though we may not recognize Him for who He truly is, to be our companion, our guide, to be the one we call "Lord."

It is really humbling to learn just how little we truly know. We may have been disciples of Christ all our lives, fed everyone a convincing line about our faith, talked the lingo, and taken the secret pledge, but never recognized His presence right in our midst. It is truly humbling to recognize that Jesus has been with us all along, that He loves us so much that He's never left our side.

My dearly beloved, hear the Good News of this day! Be humbled by His presence! Revel in His love. Give thanks that we don't have to journey this life alone.

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me. Thanks be to God. Amen.