

SEEING JESUS AGAIN FOR THE FIRST TIME

Luke 24:13-35

**Preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
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For some reason I've always been drawn to this particular Easter story that didn't happen on Easter morning but Easter at sundown.

It started out ordinarily enough, something everyone can easily relate to, an intense conversation between two friends trying to cope with a horrible turn of events when suddenly they're joined by a wise and discerning third person who not only gives a totally new perspective on things, but helps them see the bigger picture, and strangely enough, raises their hopes that something unexpected and wonderful was happening that would soon change everything.

But then out of the blue the story takes a strange twist when this third person mysteriously disappears from sight, making this "normal," very believable encounter into something beyond the abnormal. For some, this disappearance robs the story of any credibility but for others, its credibility is enhanced.

Let's quickly review what happened. Two disciples of the late and lamented Jesus of Nazareth were trudging home from Jerusalem after a particularly horrendous Passover. The man they hoped was the Messiah, after a sudden drop in popularity, was summarily tried, convicted and executed. Now, on the third day, strange rumors were swirling about claiming he was just raised from the dead. Surely these unsubstantiated reports were nothing more than old wives tales being spread by a couple of hysterical women. What was even more disconcerting, poor Peter, James and John seemed to be taken in by these crazy rumors hook, line and sinker.

As these two companions were commiserating over what was and might have been, they suddenly realized they weren't alone, a stranger was walking along with them asking, "What are you two so intensely talking about?" Quickly they shot back, "Are you kidding, have you been on the moon? Jesus of Nazareth's crucifixion is front page news!" Then their burst of indignation quickly returned back to melancholy. "We had hoped that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah who'd set Israel free."

The stranger instantly realizing the disciples needed encouragement reviewed key passages from the scriptures, and though not named they were most likely Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Suffering Servant, traditionally believed to be the people of Israel, but now for the first time being reinterpreted to be not the nation, but a single man, a suffering servant who died for the sins of the world. "Don't you see?" the stranger was saying, "Your Jesus' death wasn't an unmitigated defeat, instead it set the stage for his greatest triumph, his victory over sin and death!"

Finally the three came to the gates of Emmaus, a village seven miles from Jerusalem. As the stranger continued walking on the two begged him to stay and tell

them more about this new way of reading the scriptures and how it impacted their hopes about Jesus. So he accepted their invitation to supper.

Here's where the story goes beyond the normative human experience and leaves you with the choice to either believe it or not. The Stranger, the invited guest, unexpectedly assumed the role of the host by blessing and breaking the bread then quickly vanished from sight but not before the two disciples recognized him. One said to the other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was walking with us on the road and opening the scriptures to us?"

On the verge of a momentous "Ah Ha!" moment, while walking and listening to the "stranger," their almost cold embers of faith slowly began to glow again, as their understanding of the scriptures and thoughts about God were being restored. However, it was in the breaking of the bread their eyes were finally opened and they could see everything coming together through Jesus. Grief and confusion gave way to joy and clarity. With their faith restored it was back to Jerusalem in double quick time to start spreading the news.

The resurrection of Christ accomplished the two primary goals of Jesus' mission to planet Earth.

- 1) Jesus was born to die for our sins and be raised to new life
- 2) The resurrection shows us through Christ all things are possible

These goals may seem obvious, even to someone knowing little about Christianity, but when considering their implications, each of these goals were met to get us to rethink what it means to be Christian, not merely religious but faithful and obedient, giving ourselves away to Christ and his kingdom, by denying ourselves, picking up our crosses and following Jesus. Jesus was all about radically challenging our preconceived notions about God and "religion" by getting us to, as they say, think outside the box and step outside our comfort zones. Even cherished traditions need to be retested for relevance in case these same beloved practices ultimately hide the Gospel, but also scare others away.

That's precisely why Jesus opposed many of the Pharisees' complicated and burdensome rules and regulations that left little room for any expressions of love and reconciliation between them and the nonreligious people the scribes and Pharisees were called to love and serve, but were turned off by their cold, legalistic systems that, again, unintentionally, but quite effectively discouraged meaningful relationships between people that could lead to a meaningful relationship with God.

In the conversation that took place on the road to Emmaus, the stranger revealed newer and deeper levels of meaning in the scriptures that were always there but somehow hidden under layers of religious platitudes that did little to excite and inspire the people. The Stranger, on the other hand, opened up the scriptures like a cook peeling an onion layer after layer, until you got to the place you could clearly hear God's Word speaking with a new authority. Remember what the people said after hearing Jesus for the first time? "He speaks with authority unlike the scribes and Pharisees!"

Maybe you've had your own Emmaus Road experience, when your faith was horribly wounded and once motivational slogans like "when the going gets tough the tough get going" or "pull yourself up by your boot straps," didn't seem to cut it anymore. But then, unexpectedly a wise friend, neighbor or coworker came along side of you and you started a conversation about how God is present in your situation. Your "Stranger" opened you up to new and liberating insights and slowly but surely you sensed your faith glowing again until all at once you experienced resurrection, Christ rising up within you, maybe for the first time, maybe again for the first time. However it happened, Christ broke the bread, your eyes were opened and you recognized him.

This morning we will both break bread and pour wine together as we remember Christ, crucified and resurrected for the world. Here, at his table, eyes will be opened and spirits lifted as we accept his gracious invitation to enter the Paschal mystery, they mystery of himself, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

What happens next? That's up to you and me, but let's remember what those two disciples did. Instead of finishing their meal and going to bed after a long, torturous weekend, they immediately got up and returned to Jerusalem, the very same place they were running away from, to be with the growing number of friends and neighbors who were about to embark on the greatest adventure of all time, by living large and bold; Kingdom living, living like Jesus, bringing healing and hope, being agents of truth and justice and knowing how and when to recognize Jesus not only in broken bread but especially in broken lives.

Come to the table and let your eyes be opened. Then leave this table and continue to recognize Jesus in every person you meet and every situation you encounter.