

Sermon: Luke 24:13-35 (Easter 3A)
Christ Church Riverdale, 8 May 2011
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Luke 24:13-35 ¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then 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?" ¹⁹ He 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, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ 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 took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and 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. ²⁴ Some 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." ²⁵ Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But 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. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They 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?" ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Although I don't normally give a title to my sermons, if I did, this one would be called, "From sad looks to burning hearts." It's still Easter--the afternoon and evening of the first Easter Day in the Gospel we just heard. Cleopas and another disciple—maybe his wife—these two disciples are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Where exactly is this village they're going to? Biblical scholars aren't sure, but author Frederick Buechner has described it this way: ¹

"[Emmaus] was no place in particular, really, and the only reason they went there was that it was some seven miles distant from a situation that had become unbearable." ". . . Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make

¹ In *The Magnificent Defeat*.

ourselves forget . . . that even the wisest and bravest and loveliest decay and die; that even the noblest ideas . . . ideas about love and freedom and justice—have always in time been twisted out of shape by selfish people for selfish ends. Emmaus is where we go, where these two followers went, to try to forget about Jesus and the great failure of his life.”

In other words, it’s where we go when we need to get away from it all—when we’ve had it up to here with work or school or spouse or kids or parents. It’s where we go when we can’t bear to hear one more thing on the news about Osama bin Laden and how Al Qaeda is promising to make us pay, or about how the mayor’s budget now means laying off just 4000 teachers instead of 6000.

Cleopas and the other disciple have had it, and so they’re getting away! When this stranger starts to walk with them it’s completely normal—travelers tended to band together if for no reason other than safety. Imagine yourself walking along when Jesus asks them what it is they’re talking about. Luke tells us they stood there, looking sad. Maybe you’ve experienced this kind of pregnant pause or even paralysis when you’ve been grieving something and can’t launch immediately into explaining it to somebody else. But this is one of the big turning points in the story, and as Cleopas starts to talk about Jesus, the first peek of light starts to show on the way to what will become the blazing sunlight of recognizing the risen Christ.

Why don’t they recognize Jesus at first? It may just be that he was out of context, like when you see someone you’ve met at work on the subway in a completely different part of town and can’t put a name with the face. But our expectations also help determine what we see. There was an experiment done where people were shown a deck of playing cards with the colors reversed—black diamonds and red spades. People are so familiar with how playing cards normally look that they often couldn’t see that the hearts were black and the clubs were red. These two disciples had strong expectations about Jesus, too, but on the Sunday afternoon they walked the dusty road toward Emmaus all those expectations were in the past: “Jesus of Nazareth *was* a prophet mighty in word and deed. . . . *We had hoped* that he was the one to redeem Israel.” Then this stranger who knows so much about the Bible starts to show them black diamonds and red spades--starts to force open the past tense where they thought Jesus was locked away for good.

Yes, there was some talk earlier in the day of Jesus’ tomb being empty. Still occasionally there’s a tabloid report of how Elvis is still alive, and these reports about Jesus seem to have been taken with about the same seriousness. (By the way, you may know that my wife Amy is from near Memphis—Elvis country. One of her cousins cousin helped to embalm Elvis. So Elvis is indeed dead!) Hearing about Jesus’ body gone and a vision of angels doesn’t help Cleopas and the other disciple. I think of them like teenagers at this point in the story: “This is too weird—I’m outta here!”

Later in the service we will sing, *The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread*. This extraordinary supper is the other turning point in the story. The two disciples who trudged 7 miles in confusion and dismay to get away from it all to Emmaus are turned right around to skip back to Jerusalem full of joy! Cleopas and the other disciple learn with their spinning heads and soaring hearts that they need not to get away from it all, but to get back to

their friends and share this great news. Now we don't hear of Cleopas anywhere else in the Bible, and the other disciple isn't even named. I take comfort that they were kind of second-string disciples, not part of the "starting twelve," and yet Jesus spends the afternoon with them, leading them personally from sad looks to burning hearts.

The disciples knew the Lord Jesus, in the breaking of the bread.

Every week when we come to church there may be plenty we may want to get away from—things to make us sad and maybe even paralyze us with grief. Yet no matter how alone we feel, how isolated or discouraged, we have a dinner date at least once per week at the same table Jesus shared with the two disciples! And the good news is that you and I don't have to walk 7 miles each way, just a few steps to the altar. Yes, we're Episcopalians, so you don't have to skip on the way back to your pew from receiving Communion, but let yourself feel a spring in your step and fire in your heart that come from dining personally with our risen Lord!

The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread.