

April 30, 2017

*Luke 24:13-35: **“On the Road With Jesus!”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Sometimes we live as if Jesus is dead. Like the two disciples traveling on the day of the resurrection of our Lord, perhaps you find yourself living a life of disappointment and dashed hopes, a road of fear and uncertainty, when your mind has more questions than there appear to be answers. It is a very hard place to be. So, I ask, "what's wrong?" Like the two disciples, we stand still and are very sad for perhaps many reasons. Rather than being **On the Road with Jesus**, we tend to walk without him.

My thoughts drift to a fairly well known account in the life of Martin Luther. There are differing versions of the story, but it goes something like this:

Once, when Martin was so depressed that none of his wife's council would help, she finally put on a black, mourning dress. Luther noticed it and asked, "Are you going to a funeral?" "No," Katherine replied, "but since you act like God is dead, I wanted to join you in your mourning." Luther got the message and recovered.

It's a story that hits hard. For the two disciples on the road, things had not work out as they might have planned. And that is the way it can be in our walk down here. It is in these moments that we often find ourselves questioning Jesus: "Where did he go? He doesn't seem to be in my life, but he has left me all alone!"

Luke 24:16 states that the two disciples' eyes were prevented [or quite literally were being prevented] from recognizing Him. The question is "Why?" The reason is not clearly stated. But, the cause for their inability to see Jesus is ultimately located within themselves, and is due to the state of their spiritual eyes. They are in a dismal state, even resisting what they have heard about the empty tomb, and we can surmise from the text that they are on the brink of utter despair and ruin. Furthermore, the changed, eternal body of Jesus also had something to do with it. When eternity meets time, the ones living in time are always at a disadvantage and unable to see, unless Jesus opens their eyes in such a way that those in time can grasp it.

How is it that the eyes of the two disciples are finally opened? As they pour out their confusion and inability to make sense of everything they have heard, the hidden Lord, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Finally, as he sits with them to eat, he takes bread, blesses it, and gives it to them. Their eyes are opened in the breaking of the bread, and they know him. Scripture and an earthly, physical action of breaking bread is what Jesus uses here so that those in time might see eternal reality. And he vanishes from their sight; that is, he became invisible and these two disciples are immediately left to no longer rely on his physical presence, but on the means by which he had revealed himself to them. They are functioning in faith.

And they said to one another, "Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?" They had been **On the Road with Jesus** the whole time, or maybe I should say that Jesus had been on the road with them despite their tendency to walk without him!

He was not gone as they supposed. He was right there. And did you hear what the two disciples are saying? “Did not our hearts burn within us?” A burning heart is a heart that is filled with a warmth, a glow, a comfort, a hope, that removes all the sadness, that brings them from the brink of utter despair and ruin. And isn’t that we want too in those moments when we feel that we are living lives of disappointment and dashed hopes, and traveling down a road of fear and uncertainty, and when our minds have more questions than there appear to be answers?

Many a Christian has felt the glow and the warmth of the teachings of our Lord after wandering about in the blindness of looking for love and peace in all the wrong people, places, and things. In the words of one Lutheran theologian:

The doctrine of the suffering and death of Jesus as an atonement for the sins of the world is a word of life for the children of death, a word able to fire the heart to a new life, a new hope, new joy and happiness unknown to man before his conversion. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and carries with it nothing but peace and joy. One need only contrast the two disciples as they left Jerusalem in sadness and as they arrived at Emmaus in gladness.

When we are “down and out,” so to speak, we are lovingly invited to cast our anxieties upon the Lord because he really does care for us. To be **On the Road with Jesus** is to look at this record of the two disciples in Luke and come to an understanding that Jesus came to them through Scripture, and this is the way that Jesus wishes to come to us until that moment when we will cling to him in glory. Our sinful flesh has a hard time buying that the Bible is really what it says it is, but we have got to understand that it is through Scripture that the miracle happens in our lives. We do ourselves a terrible disservice and rob ourselves of lasting comfort when we neglect to study Scripture, or when we fail to hold onto it and live what we have learned.

In the close of our Gospel lesson for this morning we read: “And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.” As you can see from the text, the joy that the two disciples had experienced was far too great for them to keep it all to themselves. Emmaus was about seven miles away from the city of Jerusalem. That day they had already traveled the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. When it is close to bedtime they are hurrying back to Jerusalem to tell the good news to the other disciples!

It certainly is bothersome isn’t it? We have become rather lethargic about the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Perhaps that is part of the reason we tend to wallow around in the pigsty of our everyday sadness. The only close to a cure down here is for us to fight back the tears of life down here with the joys of everlasting life in Christ. And part of that is to move from a self-focused lifestyle to a burning heart that is motivated to encourage others and bear witness to the good news of what we have. When the two disciples arrive in Jerusalem and say to the other disciples that “The Lord has risen indeed,” the weight of the sentence is that the Lord has risen in truth. In other words, there is no denying it since

it is a matter of fact. What they had heard and seen was not the imagination of a highly excited mind, but was absolute. Part of the reason God assembles us together is so that we might be confirmed in our own faith when we hear what other Christians have to say about their faith. We should not neglect one another, but rather should strengthen each other as we see the day of Christ's return approaching.

On the Road with Jesus! Our lesson is full of sound advice on the meaning of the Christian faith in the resurrection of Christ. As long as faith is not sure of the resurrection, the heart is sad as in the case of the two disciples. But, when one realizes that Jesus is raised from the dead, faith at once experiences comfort and joy - a burning heart! We also learn that faith in the resurrection is based on the testimony of Scripture. In the face of living a life of disappointment and dashed hopes, a road of fear and uncertainty, and when our minds have more questions than there appear to be answers, there is really one thing to consider, God is not dead. You are **On the Road with Jesus** as long as you are connected to the way in which he ordained to be with you always - Word and Sacrament. And as you are on that very road this morning, Jesus would have you hear and say with him the words of Psalm 118:

The Lord is my strength and my song . . . I shall not die, but I shall live . . . he has not given me over to death . . . Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord . . . This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation . . . This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott