

## Walking With Jesus

A Note Before Reading: Please note that though this is my manuscript which I used to preach my sermon, this is not the exact words I preached. I often add and subtract from this document as needed during a sermon. Also this is not written to be read...but spoken. Thus the 'reading' is a bit rough. However, in the absence of a recording (due to technical difficulties) this will have to suffice.

One of my favorite phrases in the gospels is "along the way." I like the sense of movement that phrase conveys. In fact, in the gospel of Luke, Jesus and his disciples are on the move more often than not. This gives the feeling in Luke of reading a travel narrative!

This feeling and movement begins in Chapter 9 when Luke records that Jesus 'set his face towards Jerusalem,' and follows a meandering journey of Jesus and his disciples through Galilee, Samaria and Judea towards Jerusalem, a destination they do not reach until the triumphant entry in Luke 19. So much of the gospel of Luke take place 'along the way' as Jesus teaches his disciples, as he interacts with the Pharisees as he heals the sick and eats with friends and foes. All the while he is spending time with his disciples, teaching them about himself, about the kingdom of God and about the meaning of the things they see and hear.

And then they arrive in Jerusalem (or just outside) and the disciples praise the one they believe is the coming king of the Jews. IN Jerusalem Jesus meets resistance, rebuke, treason in his ranks, a trial by the officials and is crucified by the Roman authorities. Jesus is buried. Three days pass silently filled with sorrow and despair and a bit of hope. The third day arrives with speculation...even idle tales from a group of hysterical women. But ultimately the disciples believe their hopes have themselves died and been shoved into that tomb with Jesus.

And so in chapter 24, it seems that Luke has picked up the travel narrative...only this time the road leads away from Jerusalem and away from the savior who had been buried just outside the city walls. However, as this journey begins, the character of Jesus is conspicuously absent. With Jesus absent, the disciples do not find clarity in the events that have occurred, but rather, confusion. Despondent, not knowing where else to go or what else to do these two disciples headed out of Jerusalem and towards Emmaus.

They do not know what else to do. They are despondent and confused. They are in a quandary. They have seen so much, heard so much and experienced so much in the past three days that they seem to be unable to make heads or tails of the events they have witnessed. They knew Jesus' prediction concerning his own death and resurrection. Yet three days have passed with no result. Yet they heard the testimony of the women who had gone to the tomb and testified to meeting

Christ there. But they are unable to believe the story without seeing for themselves, and they dismiss it. They know that others of the disciples themselves went to the tomb and found it empty. But the explanations for an empty tomb are legion...and resurrection, at the point, ranks low in the list.

So they discuss, argue and otherwise converse on their walk back to Emmaus trying to make sense of these events. For all the talking, however, their conversation seemed to be going nowhere, with each step away from Jerusalem raising far more questions than are answered.

Just as confusion is about to overwhelm the disciples, a stranger approaches them along the way. While this may be a stranger to the two traveling disciples, he is no stranger to the narrative of Luke's gospel. In fact, this traveler is no accidental wanderer, but rather the resurrected Christ. Yet the disciples (for reasons not explained by Luke) are kept from recognizing him.

Jesus, for his part, does not immediately reveal himself to the confused and depressed disciples, rather, he merely poses a question asking, "What are you discussing here along the way?"

A curious question I suppose, but perhaps not so strange if you think about it. Jesus didn't cease to be Jesus...the teacher didn't cease to be the teacher. So perhaps before they could grasp the resurrection, they had to figure out what it is they were expecting of him in the first place.

The question obviously struck a nerve, but one of the two, named Cleopas, responds to Jesus' question, first with amazement (are you the only one in Jerusalem who didn't witness these things?), then by telling Jesus the whole sad story. They told him of their hopes. They told him that they had been waiting for the last three days that something would happen. They told him of their confusion. They told him about the glimmer hope (which only brought more confusion) due to a report of an appearance and an empty tomb.

It is odd how the information they present to Jesus here is pretty much all the information they needed to have proof of his resurrection. They had eyewitness accounts along with Jesus' own words on the matter. In fact, the only thing which could have been more definitive in the matter was Jesus' own presence and here he was...yet they could not see.

Curious.

But at this point, the ignorant stranger who had wondered at the content of their conversation becomes the teacher who schools them in the narrative of Biblical history. It would be futile to try to construct which passages Jesus used to speak about himself here, because it seems more likely, that while Jesus pointed out specific passages, the instruction he gave was more to the point that it revealed how all of scripture revealed the character of God that rendered the idea of a crucified messiah, not only plausible, but necessary. He opened the scriptures in a whole new way for them...not by giving them isolated texts to prove his point, but rather interpreting the



And perhaps this is why, as the church board sat down to consider our mission statement as a church, we too gravitated to this idea of discipleship as a journey. As we discussed, there was little doubt in our mind that the goal of the church is discipleship. But as we discussed that term, we wondered if perhaps there was language we could use to flesh out that word a bit. What, in fact, is 'discipleship' for us as Christians?

As we talked, the walk with Jesus began to take shape and this passage in particular was mentioned as one of the great 'discipleship' texts in the New Testament. The imagery of discipleship as a 'walk' seemed apt and appropriate especially in light of this passage.

But discipleship is not like a walk in the park...it is a walk with someone in particular. It is a walk with Jesus. Because we must be discipled by someone. As Christians, we claim Jesus as our teacher, the great rabbi, the one who was the image of the invisible God, the word become flesh. Because, even post-resurrection, post-Pentecost, we are people who don't always have things figured out. Even with all the information, the Old and New Testaments, and all the theology that bookshelves can hold, we don't always have the answers. We need a teacher.

We can have proximate teachers, mentors, pastors and accountability partners, but as Christians the understanding and expectation is that we learn, first and foremost, from Christ. Jesus is our teacher.

But the imagery of the Emmaus road is so wonderful because Jesus doesn't pop in and say, "here I am, believe in me!" He takes the time to assess where his disciples are, to walk along with them and to open the scriptures to them so that they might understand about him as well as know about him. It is one thing to know Jesus is the messiah. It is quite another thing to understand that the crucified and risen messiah is not just something God decided, at the last minute, would be a good idea, but something that was necessary in the unfolding story of God's interaction with and reconciliation to, humanity.

Jesus walks his two disciples through this process that they might know with their heads (which oddly comes last) and understand with their hearts just how true this whole thing is. And we also remember that this was not the first time (nor the last time) Jesus walked with, taught and journeyed with his disciples. This was a process lasting years.

This was the culmination, though not the end, of all he had been teaching them before. Jesus didn't just pop his head into the room and say, "I am the messiah, follow me, and I am off to heaven now." He walked with his disciples. He ate with his disciples. He joked with his disciples. He worked alongside his disciples. He taught them. He gave them jobs to do.

Discipleship with Jesus is not a 'one and done' sort of thing. Discipleship with Jesus is a journey of days, weeks months, years...indeed a whole lifetime. Discipleship is presence.

So when we say we are disciples of Jesus it means more than a trust in him for the gift of heaven, it is a commitment to journey with him and learn from him. But we have one big problem. Jesus isn't here...not like he was to these disciples anyway. Our walk with Jesus involves the presence of Christ in a different way.

Jesus told his disciples, on the night he was betrayed, that he was going away. He also said that this was a good thing, because when he went away, he would send the Advocate (or Holy Spirit) who would be with them always. The word Advocate literally means 'one who comes along side.' Nice huh?

Jesus came alongside his disciples that day on the Emmaus road. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to 'come alongside' his disciples to this day.

The Spirit, as Jesus says, guides us into all truth. That, my friends, is a heavy statement, but it is still true, we have the Spirit to guide us into all truth. As Jesus opened the scriptures for his disciples, the Spirit opens the scriptures to his later disciples that we might know as they knew that we might understand as they understood. But we must be careful to note that all of this happens within the context of a community of disciples.

Jesus reveals himself to the two (who were moving away from Jerusalem and away from the community) and they immediately return to Jerusalem and the community of disciples where they report what they have seen, but also where the testimony of Peter confirms what these two had seen. Discipleship needs a community, now more than ever.

So, the board adopted, "Walking with Jesus" as our statement of mission and purpose. For we are adherents to Christ, we learn from him as we read the scriptures, listen to the Spirit and live in community with one another. May each day be an Emmaus road for us as we walk with Jesus and learn from him, by the Spirit.

May we, as the community of disciples, learn together to discern and listen to the voice of our teacher through the Holy Spirit. And may we, in turn, invite others along this path.