

April 30, 20 17 The Road Story Luke 24:13-35

As a preacher/minister I struggle with the Holy Week, Easter timetable of the church. There is so much material in the Gospel records that belongs to that very short period of time. A number of times I have mentioned that half of John's Gospel is the story of that final week and the disciples' experience of the resurrection. In each of the 4 Gospels the crucifixion-resurrection story is a major portion of the whole document. Luke alone literally sets out to tell the whole story of Jesus life, comes closest to writing an historical biography, and the final week+the crucifixion and the resurrection makes up between a quarter and third of his document.

What we have to recognize as a result of that analysis is that the resurrection of Jesus or at very least the combination of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus was the story the writers set out to tell. Everything that precedes those two events, the death and the resurrection of Jesus, is set up to that main point of testimony. As the faith spread beyond Jerusalem, and as the church grew at the heart of what was presented by people who were there at ground zero, these two elements were central in a presentation of the Gospel, and its acceptance. Jesus was crucified and three days later HE was risen. HE is alive. The Lord of Life! And it is not just based on one Sunday morning experience.

So over the next few weeks I hope to make the time and take the time, to visit some of the parts of the resurrection experience that forged faith out of doubt, answers out of questions. The Easter morning reading in Luke's Gospel concludes right before the verses I read this morning. It concludes with this sentence. Peter saw the strips of linen (this is inside the tomb) Peter saw them lying by themselves and he went away wondering what had happened. In

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other words, regardless of the testimony of Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Salome, Peter has more questions than he has answers. He is not prepared to swallow, the message the women have shared with the disciples. At very least there is more doubt than conviction among the remaining disciples.

Now, that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. This is one of those texts that causes some of us to say the Biblical word that describes us is not the word Christian, but the word disciples. Luke infers it here. The women told the 11 and the others that Jesus is risen. The men in the circle of the 11 and the others have not believed their testimony. It is later in the day and two of them (the 11 plus the others) were traveling to Emmaus.

When I was a younger, I went through a time when I was a committed jogger. I could jog the distance to Emmaus...about 7 miles in just a little bit over an hour. If I was walking purposefully, I could have walked that distance in about 2 hours. We know from Luke's text that one of the travelers was named Cleopas. The other is never identified by name, but there is a tradition that it was Luke. Two followers of Jesus. Two disciples, neither of them part of that inner circle of 12. And while they may be walking purposefully, which is to say they were not strolling. They have reason to get to Emmaus. They are destination minded. As they are walking, they are talking. They talk about everything that happened. The week of teaching between Palm Sunday and Thursday. The crucifixion, including Judas part in that. And of course they are talking about the open and empty tomb, and the story brought to the disciples by the two Marys and Salome. And they probably talked about this pharisee, Joseph of Arimathea who had used his connections to ask

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for the body of Jesus and see to it HE was buried properly before the beginning of Sabbath. He was a member of the Rabbinical Council of Jerusalem. He donated the tomb. He is one of those Pharisees who was a closet disciple of Jesus. He would have been known to Cleopas and Luke and to the women who found the tomb open and empty.

If Cleopas and Luke are talking about everything that happened there is a lot to talk about.

They are joined by a 3rd traveler. When this new companion on the road asks them what they are discussing, they are amazed that there would be such a question. To them there is only one thing to talk about...Jesus, their whole experience of the last week with Jesus. Everything they have been talking about centers on Jesus of Nazareth. And they provide a very reasonable synopsis of that experience. He was a powerful prophet of God. The chief priests handed him over to the Romans to be sentenced to death by crucifixion. Cleopas, Luke and the others had hoped HE would redeem Israel. He died three days ago. Then the women came and told them Jesus is alive. And some of their fellow followers of Jesus went and checked out the tomb and sure enough it was empty, but they did not see Jesus. It is a reasonable summary of what has happened. And Cleopas did not commit themselves to this “stranger” who had joined them on the road. They did not make a single statement that witnessed to their faith that Jesus is the redeemer God has sent.

Do not get me wrong. I am no man's judge. I am not judging Cleopas for what he said or Luke for his silence. I am very tempted to say, there but for time and circumstance go I. Their uncertainty makes me say, I could easily have walked in their shoes

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following that funeral. On this walk to Emmaus. Everything said was rational. Factual. It was Jesus who said they were foolish. It was Jesus who said they were slow to believe what the prophets had written about the Christ. It was Jesus who gave them yet another lesson, unfolding from the writings of Moses, the Torah, and the prophets of the Old Testament, the recognized teachings concerning the Messiah in Jewish understanding.

And when this unrecognized stranger appeared to be leaving them, having arrived at their destination, they urged this teacher of the Scriptures to remain with them, to share their accommodation and an evening meal. It is supper time and soon it will be dark. Here is an opportunity for food and a bed...the comforts needed at the end of a full and exhausting, and emotionally packed day. One thing that has not changed. Basic to any meal in Israel is bread...and I mean a variety of bread. I you love bread, as I do, you never leave the food tables without your portion. They were about to have dinner. The stranger took bread, gave thanks to God for it, broke it and began to pass it to them. We have so much detail and so little all at the same time. Cleopas and Luke recognized Jesus, it was like the healing of the blind...suddenly....and then HE was gone. It says here Jesus disappeared. The KJV says HE vanished from their sight.

It is precisely at this point that Luke's account becomes passionate. Cleopas and Luke talked but what they talked about was their excitement when they were with Jesus and HE opened the Scriptures unto them. It was a heaven on earth experience. And what Cleopas and Luke conclude as they end their time of talk...you see they are of one mind on this....they have just spent time with Jesus whom they watched die, whom they knew was placed in the tomb

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under guard with the seal in place. Whom they had been told was risen from the dead....and they found that so hard to believe...an hour ago, or was it 45 minutes. It doesn't matter what they now know, what they now believe, is Jesus is alive. HE is risen. They have seen HIM. They have heard HIM. HE broke the bread when HE had given thanks...They have to tell Peter and the rest of the 11, and the others. And they immediately head off for Jerusalem. They know where they will all be...they know where they would be if they had not decided to journey to Emmaus...thank God they decided to journey to Emmaus!

I am left with a question. Did they run all the way? We are not told and yet between the lines of what we do have there is an emotional eagerness to get there, to be there, to share the news.

At every turn at this point there are surprises. Luke says he and Cleopas did return to Jerusalem. And they found the Eleven “and those with them assembled together.” The surprise is they are saying, “It is true. The Lord Jesus has risen and has appeared to Simon, whom we know is Peter. Several things at once. Peter has seen the Lord . The Eleven know it. They have shared that news with the others who are with them. This is at least the core if not the whole of the 120 who were that crowd, that followed Jesus everywhere and listened to HIM for the balance of three years of ministry. Some of whom watched HIM die on the cross. Some of whom watched HIS being laid in the tomb.

And finally it is the turn of Cleopas and his silent traveling companion to share their experience. How they talked so rationally about the events of the last week. How Jesus joined their company. How they arrived in Emmaus and shared a meal with HIM as their

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guest. How he took the bread and broke it when HE had given thanks...and they recognized HIM. And HE vanished. And they returned to Jerusalem to share the news. The greatest news ever. He is risen. It is true.

Let us pray;

Lord, and living Redeemer, we thank you for the testimony of your disciples concerning the crucifixion and resurrection. We thank you for their willingness to share how hard they found it to believe, having witnessed your death and burial. There are times when we too struggle with that which seems impossible. Our sinful nature rebels so quickly at the expression of faith that you are truly God having been willing to be truly human and God among our kind. Lord we thank you for your Spirit's leading us from doubt, to faith, to greater faith. We praise your name that you are our Saviour. We praise God, that the resurrection experience was so profound it changed the minds of those who had accepted that the world and death had won. We pray in the name of the living Christ. Amen