

Sermon April 23, 2023 What's Going On?

Scripture: Luke 24:13-35 (Emmaus) Psalm 116:1-9 Lord, let your voice be heard thru my mouth.

Intro

Have you ever walked the full length of the Cape Cod Canal? I'm told it's 7 miles.

The length of the Cape Cod Canal, The distance from Jerusalem to Emmaus. 7 miles. A one day journey that changed the trajectory of two lives forever. Seven miles- That's how far Cleopas and his companion walked in the company of the risen Christ not recognizing him for who he was. Seven is the number of completion. The total of 5 loaves and 2 fishes. The number of days in a week that wasn't like any other week before or since.

Picture this- the curtain rises, two people, heads down, are trudging along a road that leads away from Jerusalem, where they had celebrated the Passover with friends, when a stranger comes alongside them and strikes up a conversation. Sounds pretty normal, right? But when you know that the stranger is Jesus, things don't add up: you have to wonder, What's going on?

Jesus has just risen from the dead. He left the tomb that morning, and after a brief chat with the women, now he's heading OUT of Jerusalem? Whoa! Isn't that the wrong direction! Another thing, here we have the creator of the universe, the one who MADE Cleopas, his companion, and the road they're walking on, coming up and asking, "What's up?" AS IF he didn't know! As if he hadn't been there! Sneaky! Jesus asked, "What's going on?" when he joined them. But he already knew the answer. Was this a test? The Bible says, "they were unable to recognize Him." Supernaturally? Or was he covering his face with a hood? When he spoke, the Bible says, "they stood still, their faces downcast". Jesus stood still with them. Notice he's never in too much of a hurry that he can't stop and help someone. How do YOU react when someone stops suddenly in the middle of the walkway? I'd probably walk up their heels, or at best zoom on by them with a muttered 'Excuse Me!!' Not Jesus. He stops and waits.

Why would Jesus choose to hook up with sad people on such a joyous day? He'd just conquered DEATH for heaven's sake. He should be looking for a party! But no, here He stops on a dusty road with two people on the verge of tears. Notice that Jesus isn't put off – he'll walk right into your problem, right into your sadness. He meets you where you are! He's not upset by their long faces or their short memories. Surely it was love that kept him from laughing in their faces when they began telling Him who and what He was, and was not: these two grief-stricken disciples are about to tell the one who created life, how his life was supposed to turn out. And he listens. For 7 miles he walked with them on a journey that challenged their assumptions and cleared up their lack of understanding.

When Jesus asked, What's going on? Cleopas answered "are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who doesn't know what's happened these last few days?" Cleopas treats Jesus like a visitor, like a guest. Don't we often do the same? We keep Him at arms' length, assume he doesn't know what's going on in our world? It's really ironic when you think about it: These guys are telling Jesus what happened to Jesus, just like we try to tell God all about our issues, like He doesn't already know! Lord, you won't believe my week at the office. You gotta help me! You can't imagine how discouraged I am. Lord, if you knew what kind of pain I'm in, you'd do something! What makes you think He doesn't know? What makes you think it's up to Him to fix it? Maybe He's not the one who is uninformed? Maybe, like Cleopas, we didn't recognize His voice when He spoke.

So Cleopas starts his recital of the past week's events by talking about Jesus. He says "He WAS a prophet..." Past tense, not realizing that he's talking to the great I AM! Present tense. Jesus always steps into your present. These 2 are stuck in the past, looking backward, so they can't see what's in the NOW. Cleo says in v21 "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." Stop right there! Past tense again! If you had to see it happen to keep your hope, you had none. That's not the Abraham kind of hope. That's not faith. These guys are just like Thomas: if I don't see it, I won't believe it. Their lack of faith must hurt Jesus. Hope is standing right in front of them and they're stuck in hopelessness.

That's probably how we sound to Jesus when we sit complaining, "I thought I'd have been healed by now", "I thought I'd be further along in my Christian walk by now", "I thought I'd have seen a change in my situation by now"; surely I should have been promoted by now, "I thought God would have opened my sister's eyes by now. It's not about you, it's about glorifying God. Instead of celebrating the small gains, we focus on our expectations and disappointments. We measure the present against some future result that we want. Don't you know you can't judge the journey before it's over. God may still have another testimony to give you. The path isn't always smooth. God's plans don't always match yours. So don't close yourself off to better alternatives just because they look different from what you envisioned.

And then Cleopas again shows off his blindness by saying "what is more, it's the 3rd day since this all took place." Duh! The 3rd day, and you're LEAVING? This is why we call them "Duh-sciples". Did he never listen to Jesus when he told them that he would die and THEN RISE on the third day? Why did these two disciples not wait around a bit longer, just to see if it were true? What's the rush to leave town? And it's not as if God hadn't tried to jog his memory and clue him in, because he says (get this!). "In addition, some of our women amazed us..they went to the tomb and didn't find Jesus' body. They said they'd seen a vision of angels who said he was alive." Hellooo! HINT HINT! Did anyone even consider that angels always speak the truth? No - They assume the women were loco. They were too locked in their own preconceptions to figure out what was going on. They were too focused on their own stereotypes of what Jesus ought to be, and so didn't recollect what He'd told them about his death! They had their little stained glass image of Jesus on an earthly throne and it prevented them from noticing that the reality was totally different and totally superior to what their small minds could imagine. How can we really experience the presence of God in our lives when we won't open our eyes and our hearts to all the facets of the experience? Don't limit God! You were made in HIS image, not He in YOURS. God doesn't always act the way we want him to or the way we expect Him to, but He never deceives us. "God is not a man that he should lie".

Cleopas goes on, "some of our friends went to the tomb and found it just like the women had said, but they didn't see Jesus." Duh!

Did no one believe the angel? Were they blaming Jesus for the fact that He wasn't where they expected Him to be? How easy it is to criticize other people's lack of vision, without recognizing that you yourself are totally blind! Even Jesus couldn't keep silent any longer after that. He says, "How foolish you are! And how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken."

Why is it, when we can't figure it out, we tend to think God has abandoned us. Why don't we first search the Bible for our answers. It's our user's manual. For Christians, the journey has to start with faith. Jesus is here. He's with you, and he's walking with you. You're in this place for a reason. You may not understand it all now, but give Him a chance to work it out for your good, to teach you and to reveal himself as you keep walking the path he sets before you. God didn't create us to stand still: our

faith walk is a journey and while we move forward, we seldom see all God's handiwork clearly until we stop and look at it in retrospect.

That said, where you end up, still depends on you. These two men had to be willing to engage with Jesus. They had to be willing to open up about their thoughts and feelings and to then LISTEN to his instruction. You have to be willing to let go of your preconceived notions if they conflict with God's word. Be humble. Don't assume YOU know what's going on where God is concerned. (And I preach this to myself as well!!) Cleopas and his companion had walked with Jesus during his ministry. They were considered to be insiders, disciples, yet even they were clueless when it came to interpreting the empty tomb (clueless Cleo, new nickname). They let their emotions overrule their hope. If Jesus hadn't pushed himself back into their awareness, they would have abandoned their faith, because Jesus didn't meet their expectations. He responds with grace.

Notice too that Jesus didn't join them in a loud and crowded temple but on a lonely road. Plenty of time to get to know each other. Time enough to give him a stretch of undivided attention in which He can share his knowledge. It may have been a public road, but it became a private encounter that moved out of the public sphere and into their home. In v28 they came to their destination and as Jesus was about to bid them goodbye, these two honorable and friendly people press him to stay at their house overnight and to dine with them. They are hungry for more of his company- as we should be also. Seven miles had just whetted their desire to know more. Yet these days, some Christians are satisfied with just one hour on Sunday! You can't get to know Jesus very thoroughly in such a short time.

Cleopas mentioned that the day was almost over & for ordinary people It wasn't safe to travel on the roads at night. At this point they still didn't realize they have been walking with the Lord of Hosts, who could call down a legion of angels with one short whistle. Certainly if we keep close to the Lord on our earthly journey, we would have no reason to fear the night. Jesus accepts the invitation and joins them at the table. Notice that Jesus is willing to come into our everyday life. While he was at the table it says in v30 "he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to hand it out." Whoa! That's the role of the host! Jesus just came in and took over! He was supposed to be a visitor but he became the host. He WILL take over your life if you let him. That's why we call him LORD. You'll notice that no one objected. In fact, their reaction was surprising. As he handed them the bread, their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Why then and not earlier? What did they see? Perhaps his nail scarred hands? Those hands likely turned on the lightbulb in their minds. And right after that, right as they're gathering their wits enough to ask him a bunch more questions, He disappeared from their sight. Note that phrase – *from their sight*. Remember how sneaky he can be. He could have still been hovering there, invisible, listening with joy to their excited chatter. Their sorrow was gone; they were ready immediately to start another journey, to share the revelation. Once we recognize Jesus for who He is, our whole LIFE becomes a journey of revelation, in learning more about Him and His word. These two disciples couldn't even wait until morning to set out. That's what a personal encounter with Jesus can do to you. Darkness, robbers, fatigue, were no longer a concern. And if a stranger were to approach them on their return journey to Jerusalem and ask "What's Going On?" I think their answer would be markedly different than it was on the way out, don't you?

How's YOUR walk with Jesus going? Have you recognized his presence in your everyday life? Have you stopped talking AT Jesus long enough to LISTEN to him? Have you thanked Him for his patience, his grace? Are you opening your eyes to the possibility that He is right there in the midst of your struggle, waiting in the present moment for you to stop rehashing the past or dreaming about the future. Let Him lead you through the NOW, and trust tomorrow to Him. Ask Him to help you recognize when

he's speaking through a stranger – or the occasional angel. If you keep faith with Jesus, you can trust Him to always guide you in the right direction - even when you yourself have no clue *What's Going On*.

Prayer: Loving God, companion on the way, you walk behind, beside, and beyond us. You catch us unawares. Break thru our barriers, our blindness, our grief, our cynicism, and change our vision, so that with wide-eyed wonder we may find our way, then journey on as messengers of your good news.
AMEN