Blessings from the Stranger

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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.
(Luke 24:13-35)

1. Jesus is the Stranger

Last week, I saw a video asking Jewish people "Who is Jesus to you?" The answers varied. The interviewer in the video asked the question, "Why do Jews not believe Jesus is the Messiah?" Many of the people being interviewed replied that the Messiah will fix the world to what it is supposed to be but nothing happened when Jesus came. We Christians believe in Jesus because he is risen from the dead, but Jesus for many people remains a stranger to this day. Have you ever thought about the possibility that everyone can be blessed by the stranger? Today's scripture talks about it.

2. Two Disciples on the Road to Emmaus

Luke 24:13-35 tells us about two disciples traveling on a road to the town of Emmaus the day after Jesus was resurrected. The disciples were two of the broader group of disciples that followed Jesus. One of the two disciples is named in verse 18, Cleopas. The other disciple is not identified in the Bible. Although the exact location of Emmaus has not be definitely identified, the Gospel of Luke tells us that Emmaus was located about 7 miles from Jerusalem. It is quite a long walk.

Why were the disciples leaving Jerusalem for Emmaus? Were they afraid after the execution of Jesus? We can't know for sure, but Luke tells us that the disciples were grieved about the death of Jesus. While on the road to Emmaus, the two disciples talk about the death and resurrection of Jesus. While discussing this, Jesus appears and begins to walk with the two disciples. They don't recognize Jesus. How could they not recognize Jesus, the person they had followed as disciples? We don't know the exact reason.

Jesus asks them, "***What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"*** (verse 17) Cleopas replies, "***Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"*** (verse 18) Jesus asks "what things?" They say, "***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"*** (verses 19-20).

The disciples can't believe that this stranger doesn't know about what has been happening in Jerusalem over the past several days. Everyone would have known about the death of Jesus and how that happened in Jerusalem.

The disciples explain what happened. They share about their disappointment at Jesus' crucifixion and the news that Jesus had risen again. The disciples went to the tomb to see Jesus, but all they saw was the empty tomb.

Jesus replies, "***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?***" (verses

25-26) Jesus outlines the meaning of his death in the Old Testament and explains why it was necessary for Jesus to suffer, die, and rise again.

3. Their Eyes are Opened

As they reach Emmaus, the two disciples notice that Jesus seems to be planning to keep walking. They exhort Jesus to stay with them and offer hospitality to this stranger. When they sit to eat, Jesus takes the bread and blesses it. Immediately, the eyes of the disciples are opened and they recognize the stranger as Jesus. At that moment, Jesus disappears.

One of the most characteristic activities of Jesus' ministry in Luke's Gospel is eating. Luke 7:34 says, "***The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners***."

The two disciples don't recognize Jesus in his teaching or preaching but in the ordinary sharing of a meal. When Jesus shares the food, the disciples immediately remember the experiences of eating they had with Jesus and recognize that Jesus has been with them this whole time.

While Christine was sick last week, some people brought food for us. We were so grateful for their thoughtfulness and care. Since she was in bed quite often I did not expect Christine to cook for me. I thought it would be the opportunity for me to learn about cooking. But from the day one, she fixed every meal for me. I was so sorry for her and grateful for her care. Her cooking gave me an eye-opening experience. I realized that God had been taking care of me through her. I experienced God's love and care through her.

4. They Return to Jerusalem

After Jesus disappears, the disciples ask 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?***" (verse 32) The disciples knew that something changed in their hearts when they met Jesus on the road. Now the disciples understood that the reason was because of Jesus.

Verse 33 and 34 tell us that the disciples got up and returned to Jerusalem in the late evening. The two disciples find the eleven disciples and tell them "***What had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread***" (verse 35).

The two disciples were so excited about sharing their encountering experience of Jesus so that the two left Emmaus immediately, even in the late evening. The two walked back the seven miles they just had walked to affirm the resurrection of Jesus with other disciples.

5. Conclusion

What does the story of Emmaus teach us? We live in a world where we are taught to fear the strangers. We tell our children not to talk to strangers because we are wary of strangers. We think they might bring us harm. They might bring us disease. They may take away our jobs. They may bring us burdens. They may disturb our peace. They may be a threat to our security so that we do our best to protect us. But we have to remember that strangers can be blessings to us.

America used to be known as a "Christian country" but because of fear, we forget what the Bible says in Exodus 22:21: "***You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."*** The two disciples welcome the stranger inviting him to stay with them that night. Why do you think they invite the stranger? I am sure they enjoyed talking with the stranger. They probably want the stranger to be their friend. That's why they invite the stranger to stay and sit down and share their food.

Three years ago, Christine and I were strangers to you and you were strangers to us. Before we got married, we were strangers each other. But God brought us together as husbands and wives and as part of one congregation. You became blessings to us. We hope we are blessings to you all. We can be God's blessings to one another as Jesus became blessings to the two disciples.

6. Application

Today's story reminds us of how God blesses us. The risen Jesus walks with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and helps them to see the risen Christ. King David says in Psalm 139:7-8. "***Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I rise on the winds of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will hold me fast***." David admits in the psalm that there is no place where he can hide from the Lord. Wherever he goes, God is already there.

David also says in Psalm 23:6. "***Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life***." David recognizes that God's goodness and mercy will be with him always. The term "mercy" refers to the Hebrew word "*hesed*" which means God's faithful love revealed in his covenant. The psalmist reminds us that God's love would be with David and with us forever.

There are often moments in life where we might feel like God is distant or can't see what God might be doing in a difficult situation. We might feel like God is in a disguise or is somewhere often in the distance. The passage today reminds us that God walks always with us in strangers. God can be right next to us and we might not even recognize him. But when we are in the moments where God may feel distant, we are reminded that we may just need to open our eyes and see God's presence in strangers. Strangers could be angels from God. Praise God who walks with us always. Amen.