

Sunday Apr. 4, 2021

Lesson 5: Encounter on the Road to Emmaus

Scripture: Luke 24: 13-35; 2 Corinthians 5:17

Context:

The next part of our section on holiness focuses on the holiness we receive in Jesus Christ. As the church begins the great fifty days of Easter, we celebrate how the resurrection of Christ changes us. Because of what Jesus has done in his death and resurrection, we are given a new way of life. We were once dead and now the Lord has risen us from our tombs.

The scripture lesson this morning comes from one of the resurrection narratives in the gospel of Luke. While not all the gospels record multiple resurrection sightings, the ones we do have involve Jesus interacting and being physically present with those who see him. As he interacts with them, they are shocked, terrified, or surprised Jesus has risen from the dead.

In this gospel lesson, Jesus meets two disciples on the road to Emmaus, a village outside the city of Jerusalem. We know one as Cleopas and the other is unnamed. We know the mystery disciple is not one of the eleven as the narrative later recounts their rush back to Jerusalem to the remaining eleven disciples known for being with Jesus.

There are several important points to this narrative about the resurrection of Jesus and how this interaction played into the formation of the Christian community in the early church and in life today. The first is how the disciples did not recognize Jesus until it was time. Only after instruction in scripture and the Lord's Supper, did the two disciples recognize Jesus. Faith is not coerced or overwhelmed by revelations to the unprepared as the concise statements of Jesus tell them what they need to know and teach.¹ The disciples have to understand and hear before they can fully "see" Jesus and understand what his resurrection means for their lives.

The second major point to this story is how Christ is revealed in the Lord's Supper, a sacramental meal giving us a glimpse into the grace we receive in Holy Communion. The language points to the meal recorded in Emmaus as the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, most definitively in the language: "took...blessed...broke...gave..."² The text points to the importance of the two acts as the disciples have experienced Christ in word (interpreting the scriptures) and sacrament (the breaking of bread).³ Thus, all Christians are given instruction for how we are to remember our Lord in worship.

Finally, the encounter in Emmaus sends the disciples out in mission. They have seen the Lord and it is now time to share with the community. They begin by going back to the eleven, to Jerusalem, the center of the Christian mission.⁴ We know from other

¹ Fred B. Craddock, "Luke," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 285.

² *Ibid.*, 286.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 288.

records of how Jerusalem became the epicenter of the Christian movement as missionaries were sent from there all over the Mediterranean.

Application

The road to Emmaus has become a favorite classic to preach in the season of Easter and to use for special teaching moments about the resurrection and encountering Jesus. Spiritual communities called the Walk to Emmaus have impacted countless lives as individuals travel to secluded locations for spiritual direction, studying scripture, and breaking bread with fellow Christians. There are beautiful paintings of the event to remind us of how Jesus walks with us daily.

Jesus appearing on the disciples on the road to Emmaus is both beautiful and formational for Christians. We are reminded of how both word and sacrament are important for Christians to receive not just occasionally, but as often as possible. These are both means of holiness for us as God works through both of them to draw us closer to God just as Jesus did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

As we read the scriptures both in corporate worship and in individual reflection, God speaks into our lives and reminds us of how we first and foremost belong to God. Jesus tells the disciples on the road to Emmaus of how his story is connected to the whole canon of scripture, from the prophets all the way to the leadership of Moses. As we read the sacred text whether it is the Old Testament or New Testament, we are reminded of how God has always been active in the lives of humanity. Given the chance, we should study it as much as we can, whether alone or in community as we come to know who God is and what God does in our lives.

The other means of holiness Jesus mentions is one we cannot do alone or on our own. Receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion is one we do alongside others as Jesus makes clear here in the Emmaus text and of course at the Last Supper with his disciples. When we gather to remember our Lord and his life, we are instructed “to do this in remembrance of me” as we receive the bread and the juice. In the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup, we receive a means of grace by which God works invisibly in us to quicken, strengthen, and confirm our faith in Jesus. It is a communal event, one in which we are brought closer together in union with our Lord and with one another. The table is open as we remember that Jesus was fully revealed to those who did not realize it was him until they broke the bread and realized what was taking place.

Yet the Emmaus narrative is not just about our own edification. As we read of what took place in Emmaus, we hear how those two disciples who are otherwise absent in the gospels are given the task of sharing the good news with others. They of course begin with eleven, but one can only imagine this was a tale they could scarce keep to themselves. What happened in Emmaus needed to be proclaimed everywhere to both those who followed Jesus and to those who had not yet heard the good news.

The same goes for the Christian community of today. In the church, we often understand the importance of word and sacrament. We know why worship is important and why we need to be a part of the body of Christ whenever we can do so. Yet what is also important is to be in service in the world, to go out and to tell the good news in both word and deed. God calls us to remember and honor him by rushing out to proclaim Jesus has risen and we have experienced his goodness.

As an ordained elder in the church, God has called me to four major components in my ministry. I am called to preach and teach the scriptures by precept and example, to preside over the sacraments, to order the life of the church, and to lead the church in service to the world. All of them bring me great joy and all of them play into each other. As we hear and read the word, receive the means of grace in Holy Communion, we are given what we need to serve the world around us. For us, Easter is not just about pretty clothes or getting our Jesus in on one Sunday. It is about being resurrection people, those to whom God has shown up and called to proclaim his good news to the world in a life of piety and holiness.

How do you study scripture individually and communally? Why do you think it is important to receive Holy Communion in community with others? What do you think service looks like in your context? What does it mean to be transformed not just on Easter, but each and every day or your life?

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