

The Journey

Luke 24:13–32 (NRSV)

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?”

Introduction. Have you ever been told a story that you either thought was too good or too bizarre to believe? You know, it just seemed impossible. Based on your life experience and your presuppositions about life, it just did not seem credible?

Sometimes we as pastors tell stories which may sound that way. *I enjoy reading the work of a particular Christian author but many of his stories I doubt their full authenticity.* I am convinced he uses a liberal literary license in telling his personal stories. While I imagine they could be true as he tells them, they seem a bit out there for me.

Luke tells us this beautiful story of two Jesus' followers who later in the day when Jesus was reportedly raised were traveling to their home in Emmaus. They had heard reports of Jesus being raised from the dead but the evidence that was presented made them hopeful on one hand but lacked the necessary weight to convince them it had happened. They did not know if the story was credible. There was an empty tomb, no body and stories of angels appearing to some women telling Jesus was raised. *Dare they believe Jesus was raised from the dead?*

Jesus in the Ordinary.

As the day pressed on, these two decided it was time to head home. So they began their 7 mile journey to their home in Emmaus. It was on this excursion that they encountered Jesus in a life altering fashion.

There are few in any activities more common and universal to our human experience than "going somewhere." Going is a normal and regular part of our life experience. How many places will you go today? – go to church, go to Sunday school, go out to eat, go to the mall, go to see a movie, go to see a friend, go shopping, go to do something fun, go to a child's game, etc. Tomorrow many of us will go to school or work, go home, go to the grocery store, etc. Journeys are a constant part of our experience.

Even the patient who is bedridden will go – go to the hospital, go to the doctor, go to rehab, go home, etc.

These two travelers were doing something common, a part of everyday, ordinary life. They were on the way home. **It was in the common and ordinary they encountered Jesus.** There is a high likelihood that all of us here will encounter Jesus in the ordinary moments of our lives. Often like the Emmaus travelers, we may fail to recognize him initially, particularly in ordinary moments of life.

I love this part of the story because it tells us of the nature of the God we have gathered here to worship. *It is Christ who takes the first step toward us.* Jesus comes to where we are, in the places where we live.

A few weeks ago, I mentioned an important theological concept we as United Methodists cherish – *prevenient grace.* Long before we come to Christ or even long for Him, He comes to us. He joins us along our journey. When have you noticed Jesus being with you in the ordinary of your life?

Experience and Journey.

In the Emmaus story, *I am struck by the fact Luke uses the backdrop of a journey as the setting for the story* – two people traveling to Emmaus encounter the resurrected Jesus. They are not at the tomb or see angels. They are walking home.

Many seem to view Christian faith as primarily an experience or an event. The Emmaus pilgrims shared with their guest the report of the greatest event of history – Jesus was reported raised from the dead. The tomb was empty, no body and appearances of angels to confirm. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus were defining moments for our Faith.

Clearly experiences and events are critical to our Faith. There is no Christian faith without Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection. The Apostle's Creed speaks clearly to the tangible events in Jesus Christ.

Experiences and events are very important to our personal spiritual development – conversion, “getting saved,” receiving enlightenment, being healing, being delivered from some hurt, habit or hang up, baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, being part of a moving service. Every year, UM youth are touched deeply by an experiential event in Pigeon Forge called Resurrection. Spiritual experiences and events can be very moving, meaningful and transformative.

As a church, we are gifted in putting on significant events or experiences. We have just come out of season of these – stations of the cross, Holy Week services, Eggstravaganza and Easter Sunday. A great deal of thought, energy, prayer and work went into these events. People's lives were touched. People walked away from these knowing they had encountered the Living God.

Luke follows the story of the resurrection event with a story of a journey. I believe that is no accident. I believe the very setting of this story is communicating another dimension of living as a disciple of Jesus Christ. As important as spiritual experiences and events are, another component is equally as important to each of us – the journey.

Journey is a common backdrop for biblical stories – Abraham journeys to a place God calls him to go, Moses leads the Hebrews from Egypt to the Promised Land, the Jewish are exiled from the home and then return, Jesus often was on a journey with his disciples and Paul went on missionary journeys. It seems there is this close connection of our faith to a journey. We may have many wonderful experiences that are profound, but for faith to be complete it involved a journey with Jesus.

Paul used the analogy of race. He wrote: “*I have run the race, I have finished the course.*” The author of Hebrews urged his readers to “*run the race with perseverance.*” Jesus said that “*no one who puts their hands to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom.*” (Plowing with a team of animals is a journey.) The early followers of Jesus were called people of the “Way” or “Road.”

It is in the midst of our ongoing journey of life where we can best get to know Jesus.

There is a wonderful Christian movement called the Emmaus Walk, which is largely a 4 day spiritual experience where pilgrims go on retreat and are able to focus on Jesus and be loved deeply. The weekend retreat is an event filled with many life impacting experiences. But the movement encourages every participant not to stop with the event but to engage in an ongoing small group. The Emmaus Walk does not end with the weekend experience. It is a journey.

It is in the journey of our lives – the ordinary, everyday part of our lives where we have ongoing contact with Jesus. As the song says, “He walks with us and talks with us,” but it is not only in the garden but in the workplace, in the class room, on the basketball court, in the courtroom, at the dinner table and in the marketplace. He comes to us where we are to walk and to talk with us.

In 1884, E. Stanley Jones was born. As a teenager, he and a band of boys decided to attend a revival service to disrupt the service but something happened to Jones. God's Spirit spoke to him and he gave his life to Christ. Soon he felt a calling to ministry, went to school at Asbury and was launched into ministry in India. There he sensed the calling to minister to the educated and well-versed. He felt it was important that Indians who trusted in Christ not abandon their own culture. He had tremendous success in his ministry in India and was clearly one of the most influential Methodist of the 20th century. Jones kept up a rigorous schedule and it was estimated he preached over 60,000 sermons up until age 87 when he had a serious stroke. After great struggle, he was able to preach 50 more times before his death at age 89.

In his devotional book, *The Word Became Flesh*, E. Stanley Jones wrote: *“For 60 years I’ve thought about one subject, have spoken about that one subject, and have written about that one subject – that one subject, a person, Jesus Christ. After thinking and talking about that one subject for 60 years, one should be bored and should want a moral holiday, want to get away and to think about something else. On the contrary, I was never so excited, so exhilarated, so full of surprise as not. Something new breaks out from him every day, a surprise around ever corner.”* E. Stanley Jones knew something about the “journey.”

For each of us, that journey is daily and ongoing. As we open our lives and stay connected to Jesus he joins us on that journey.

Invitation to come in.

As the two Emmaus pilgrims walked with Jesus along the road, they felt their hearts warmed. When they came to their home, Jesus acted as though he was continuing his journey. So these two invited Jesus into their home and offered him the evening meal. As they sat at the table, he took the bread, offered thanks and gave it to them. Immediately their eyes were open and they realized this man who had been walking with them was Jesus, the Risen Savior.

Along our journey and in deeply spiritual events, we often encounter Jesus. He is with us and among us. He comes and joins us where we are and walks with us. It is a matter of his grace.

Luke’s story of these pilgrims are so important hear because something was lacking for them until they invited Jesus in. It was when they open their home and let down their guard they were able to recognize Jesus.

Here is the key for us – inviting Jesus into our lives, inviting him to join us on the journey. He does not force himself upon us even though he so longs to have a deep and personal relationship with us. That invitation is not merely one that starts the journey but it is one that is continued throughout the journey. Will you this day invite Jesus in?

The Table.