



“The Whole Story”

April 18, 2021

Luke 24:25-27

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Today we continue our exploration of Luke 24 and the encounter the two disciples had with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. They were walking and talking with Jesus, sharing with him all that had transpired. In fact, they did not even recognize him at first and they still do not realize Jesus is their traveling companion in these 3 verses for today. That revelation is still to come. The disciples on that road to Emmaus followed Jesus but did not fully understand who he was. Why is that? Perhaps they believed the words of Jesus with their head, but not with their heart. They needed a second look at Jesus, another look with fresh eyes, in order to see the whole story. The same goes for us today, as well. We follow Jesus but sometimes we do not fully understand, either. We also need to go deeper, past the mind, and into the heart. We need to see the whole story. In Jesus we see the fullness and fulfillment of God’s plan and promises. Jesus’ death and resurrection gives us a new understanding. It provides a lens through which we can live and structure our lives. Therefore, we ask: how do we see the whole story? What is God revealing to us this day?

Last week Rev. Call highlighted the importance of trusting women, especially trusting the witness of the women to Christ’s resurrection. There was doubt that their witness was true. It was considered an idle tale, nonsense, an astounding word. Today we circle back with Jesus’ response to the doubt they had in the women. After Cleopas told Jesus what he and the other disciple had been talking about (and the original text suggests that they were actually disputing with one another about what had happened), Jesus rebukes them. He said “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!” (24:25). We are going to unpack this rebuke and bring out a few points from within. But first, let’s revisit the unnamed disciple. Rev. Call presented the possibility last week that this disciple was in fact, a woman. Catholic and Orthodox traditions suggest that Cleopas is a variant of “Clopas.” In John 19:25, it is revealed that Mary, wife of Clopas, is present at Jesus’ crucifixion. This specific Mary is not identified as one of the women who observed the resurrection, at least not with any certainty. It is interesting that Jesus’ rebuke was directed towards both disciples, not just one of them. The Intervarsity Press Women’s Bible Commentary sheds an interesting light on this rebuke: “At this point the stranger bursts in with a rebuke for the failure to accept the word of the women. Their testimony reveals the fulfillment of all that the prophets have foretold of God’s design for human redemption through the death and resurrection of Messiah Jesus. Jesus, the unidentified stranger, launches into a confirmation of the women’s report by an exposition of the scriptures concerning himself. The issue is one of God’s promises, conveyed first by the ancient prophets and then by the terrified but faithful women.”¹ I can attest that as a woman, it is bad enough when men do not believe us. However, it hits even deeper when other women do not believe us. Is it possible that the other disciple was actually a woman who witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion but now could not believe in his resurrection? It is something worth considering. At any rate, the faithful witness of the women was not believed, and Jesus rebukes these disciples for it.

This rebuke raises another interesting point. Some translations use the word “mind” instead of “heart,” with Jesus telling them that their dull minds are what kept them from believing. The original Greek uses the word “heart” and I think it hits at a key aspect of our faith. These disciples of Christ have presumably spent time with him, learning from him, journeying with him. You can walk hundreds of miles with Jesus, travel everywhere with him, physically follow after him, but if your heart has not been changed, all of that means nothing. If everything remains in the theoretical, the factual, the informational but you never journey deeper into the heart of faith, you will never experience the transformation Jesus calls for us to have. We can think about and believe something is true with our mind, but in order to impact change it needs to be believed in the heart. Mental assent is not enough for us. Jesus called them slow of heart because his life, testimony, and word, not to mention all that the prophets had foretold and all that the women

¹ Kroeger, C. and Evans, M., 2002. *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, pp.283-284.

faithfully believed and shared, had not taken root deep in their hearts. Believe the words Jesus speaks to you. The word of God will not fail.

How else do we know that their hearts had not been fully devoted to Jesus? Look back to how they described him: “a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (24:19). A prophet? It is not inaccurate to say that Jesus was a prophet, but that is hardly the whole story. When Jesus asked his disciples “‘Who do the crowds say that I am?’ They answered, ‘John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered, ‘The Messiah of God.’” (9:18-20). They had already given up hope that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Now he is just a prophet to them. They had followed him, but their hearts had not been transformed.

My intention here is not to skewer these disciples. It is easy for us with our modern eyes to criticize the disciples all throughout the gospels for not getting it. We have the benefit of knowing how the story ends. We read with a Christological lens, meaning we read scripture with the understanding that Christ is the fulfillment of prophecy from the Hebrew scriptures. But they did not necessarily hear or see it that way back then. But you know what? We do not always get it right, either. We miss the point, we miss the seemingly obvious clues. We also need Jesus to bring us into focus and help us see clearly. Yes, the disciples missed out on a crucial understanding of faith, of what Jesus meant. But so do we. We need our eyes opened and a fresh revelation, too. Jesus is showing us in this passage that we can now see the world through Christ. Jesus makes sense of things for us. And we will see that as the story of the Emmaus Road Encounter unfolds, Jesus will bring things into focus for these disciples and make sense of things for them, as well.

Our passage for today continues by saying “‘Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” (24:26-27). And now we, as the readers, are left to wonder what exactly Jesus said to these two disciples. They had about a seven mile walk, so you could cover a lot of content in that time, especially if you were going at a leisurely pace! We have no specific references mentioned here, so maybe we are inspired to search for places in the Hebrew Scriptures where it references the Messiah suffering. Well, you would be out of luck. There is no reference to a suffering Messiah in the Old Testament or any texts of pre-Christian Judaism. A text that we do often reference is that in Isaiah 52-53, the Suffering Servant. You might recognize this selection from Isaiah 53, “He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; as one from whom others hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him of no account. Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgression, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.” (Is 53:3-5). We understand the servant in this prophetic text to be Jesus. But we do know that Jesus himself foretold his death and resurrection three distinct times throughout the gospel. Jesus does not mince words about the suffering he will face and the fact that it is necessary. The third foretelling of his death in Luke 18:31-34 reads, “Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again.” But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.” He prepared his disciples for this exact moment but when the time came, they missed it. In fact, they did not really understand it when Jesus talked about it when he was still alive! In our passage for today we see Jesus insisting that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then enter into glory. This was inherently difficult for the disciples to understand. Sometimes we speak of the mysteries of God, and this certainly falls into that category.

It is difficult for us to understand, too. I am sure that I am not the only one who has wondered why it had to be accomplished in this way. The human heart cannot fathom the depth of love that would compel God to accomplish God’s action of salvation in Christ. We speak of the holy mysteries of God, one of which being Holy Communion, where we trust and know that Jesus Christ is present with us in those moments through the Holy Spirit, but we cannot fully articulate how. It is a mystery. God works in mysterious ways, right? Isaiah 55:8-9 read “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” God’s plans are oftentimes beyond our comprehension. God works in ways we cannot understand. God works in ways that are surprising. Unexpected. Novel. Creative. Ironic. Just look at Jesus’ death and resurrection. These disciples had lost hope. They thought the one who would redeem Israel was killed and now his body is gone, but surely he has not resurrected. It would seem that death and evil had won the day

and everything was over. But just wait. As promised, Christ rose from the dead on the third day, victorious over sin and death. In a mighty reversal, Jesus triumphed over the grave. So yes, God works in mysterious, incomprehensible ways. I know that we all encounter or are currently living through something that makes you wonder “what in the world is God up to? Where is God in this?” God wants us to trust in God’s power, goodness, and faithfulness even when it seems like the forces of evil are winning, when all evidence would suggest otherwise. Hold fast to the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. Hold fast to the truth that in Christ death is never the final word. Hold fast to the love of Christ that keeps you deeply rooted. Hold fast knowing deeply in your heart that God is with you and actively working for your good. Hold fast when it seems like all hope is gone. Hope is alive in the risen Christ.

The title for this sermon series is “Open Our Eyes” but it is more than just a title. It is the prayer of our hearts to God. Open our eyes, God. Help us to see. Help us to see you when things do not make sense. Help us to see the ways you are at work in the world so that we can join with you in ministry and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Open our eyes to your presence with us. Open not just our eyes but our heart so that we can fully receive you. We yield our lives to you. We desire to be the disciples you call us to be. Open our eyes, God, so that we might faithfully follow you. Amen.