

The Road to Emmaus/ The Road out of Jerusalem--Luke 24:13-35

If you know me very well at all, then you may know that I just love a good story. I love to hear a good story and I love to tell one. And this story, the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is a good story.

And although we have likely heard it a hundred times or more, it is well worth hearing again, I think. Just as a reminder. For this story, like so many in scripture, is not just a story about what happened, once upon a time to them back then, but it is also a story about what happens ALL the time, ever to us, right now.

The story, as you will recall, takes place sometime in the afternoon and evening of that very first Easter Sunday. Two of Jesus' followers are making their way down the road toward a place called Emmaus.

Now these two are not part of the *most* inner circle, the twelve apostles (or by this point, the eleven). No they are just folks more or less like you and I, I suppose - just two folks who heard about Jesus, liked what he had to say, believed in it and decided to, in some shape or fashion and to some degree or the other, follow him.

We don't know much more about them than that. We are told that one of them is named Cleopas, the other remains nameless. It could have been a friend, a brother, or as some have suggested, maybe it was even his wife.

But whoever they were, they were walking along and talking together about what had happened over the past few days, (I suspect especially about what had happened on Friday).

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And they were feeling downright dejected. The text tells us that they looked sad (a tender and touching thing to say, don't you think?).

We don't know why they were going to this particular place - Emmaus. Perhaps it was their home and they had family there. Maybe they were anticipating that they would have to eat a little humble pie when they got there, for being so impetuous as to have gotten all caught up with this latest in a never ending stream of so-called prophets and miracle workers- for having been so foolish as to have believed that this one, this Jesus (from *Nazareth* you say?) would somehow be... different.

Or maybe this place called Emmaus was really no place in particular, at all. Maybe the only reason they were headed toward Emmaus was that it was seven miles distant from the place where they could no longer bear to be.

Surely, we can identify with that. For when your heart is heavy and you don't know what else to do, you sometimes just go for a walk, and seven miles is a good long walk. So maybe we shouldn't call it the "road to Emmaus" at all. Maybe it would be more accurate to just call it "the road the heck out of Jerusalem".

Even biblical scholars and archeologists don't know where Emmaus is on the map, but we all know the road that takes us there and I suspect we have all walked it at least a time or two in our life. Sadly, maybe some of us are even walking that road right now.

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Emmaus, you see, is that place we arrive at, somewhere just past disappointment and right before despair. It is that place where hope is lost and we no longer have the energy, or frankly even the interest, to even look for where we may have lost it.

Emmaus is that place where we feel like throwing up our hands (and maybe we do) and just say “to heck with it all”. Emmaus, my friends, is that place we set out toward when we just want to leave Easter and all this talk about new life and resurrection behind us, when we find it no longer rings true.

“We had hoped” the two disciples told the stranger, “we had hoped” but it didn’t turn out as we had hoped it would.

We had hoped... we say when the phone doesn’t ring after the job interview that seemed to go so well.

We had hoped... we say when the rehab program or the anger management class doesn’t really change a thing.

We had hoped... we say when the marriage ends, the child rebels, the business goes belly up.

We had hoped... we say as we gather our loved one’s belongings from the hospital room before heading home alone.

I suspect that Cleopas and his companion thought for sure that they had left Jesus and all that went with him, behind them in the death and dust of Jerusalem. That was the point of this journey after all. But as they would soon find out and as we might experience as well, Jesus was not only behind them but was right there with them and was somehow walking up ahead of them too.

It turns out, you see, that the road to Emmaus is precisely the sort of place where Jesus shows up and comes alongside us on our journey, though quite often, he appears more like a stranger than a friend.

Although these two were disciples, followers of Jesus, who had almost certainly spent countless hours with him and had likely traveled other roads together, maybe even walking along beside him before, they still had difficulty recognizing him that day.

Now we might imagine that the reason they didn't recognize him was that Jesus had somehow changed his appearance, was somehow in disguise so to speak, so that they would not know who he was. But what if the truth is that the reason, they had such a hard time recognizing him was that they did not really know who Jesus was in the first place.

They had hoped he would be a great liberator. They had hoped he would do it the way *they* thought it should be done. They had hoped he was almost anything other than what he had turned out to be.

And I must confess that I can identify with that as well. I too sometimes have difficulty recognizing Jesus as he walks along side me on my journey for the truth is, he keeps showing up in ways that I neither expect nor frankly prefer.

But Cleopas and his companion were true to their upbringing and they recalled the stories that reminded them to always welcome the stranger for we have been strangers too, and they invited this stranger to stay with them, to abide with them some translations say, and something then happened that opened their eyes and forever changed their lives.

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Somehow in the way he told the stories like they had never heard them told before,

Somehow in the sitting at table together and in the sharing of the meal,
Somehow in the brokenness of the bread,

Somehow in the face of a stranger, they suddenly recognized Jesus and they finally understood who he was. And maybe they saw themselves reflected there and they finally understood who they were too.

And somehow in that moment the resurrection became no longer a rumor or an idle tale but rather, the story of their life and their whole world renewed.

It was just for a moment, just a flash, and then it was just as quickly gone. Moments like that, moments of true epiphany and recognition are often fleeting things. But in that brief moment of seeing their burdened hearts become burning hearts and the direction in which they were going and their whole life journey and was literally turned completely around.

Moments like that require looking with more than our eyes and listening with more than our ears. Moments like that require seeing with our whole hearts and hearing with all of our being and imagination.

They require that we live no longer from distraction to distraction, from escape to escape but rather from the simple awareness of one small but precious miracle to the next.

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And what we may see there, if only for a flash, is Jesus himself. And what we may hear there is the first faint sound of his voice somewhere deep within us saying that there is purpose in this life, and even in our life, whether we can understand it or not; and that our destiny is not to be found on the road to Emmaus but in the love that was revealed in Jerusalem and abides with us wherever our journeys may take us.