

Preaching Help for Luke 24:13-35

“Walking With Strangers”

by Pastor Tim Sersen



*Diversity in our community is an asset not a liability.
Immigrants coming to us are gifts to our churches.
We learn and move into uncertain futures listening to those who see life differently.
This text is an invitation to walk with strangers and discern the face of the risen Lord.*

Thoughts on Approaching Preaching

Many times texts are approached to give the listeners a to do list. While it is true that the grace of Jesus Christ and the Love of God project designs for how we are to live, we start with something more basic. Where is Christ to be found in a text. Here Jesus is the stranger who joins us on the road.

Secondly we do an exegesis on our culture and the people whom we live among. What are the deep needs and longings that we feel deep in our hearts? When we find ourselves “on a road to nowhere” there we may be met by strangers who help us to find the way.

Read again Luke 24:13-35 and ponder the Jesus who meets us on the road and the diverse community of people around us who long to walk with God in a world where hope can fade.

So now let’s look more closely at the themes in this passage and the possibilities that are opened up to us.

Historicity

I’ll not forget a sermon that I heard years ago on this passage, although I don’t remember when I heard this or even who it was who was preaching. The preacher proclaimed: “Emmaus never happened but Emmaus happens every day.”

Some commentators feel that this story reads more like a legend rather than an historical incident. Some even go so far as to claim that a hand later than Luke added this to the manuscript. How they can maintain that assertion is beyond me. As I read it the familiar, unique themes of Luke/Acts all seem to be present here.

Why not historical? Probably the foundation to this claim comes from those who reject a historical resurrection. If the resurrection was simply a psychological event in the minds of the followers of Jesus then accounts of his appearances can’t be historical. But we need not be stuck here. As we walk among strangers our eyes can be opened and we can see revelation in surprising and-grace filled ways.

Then there is the strange claim that these disciples of Jesus were unable to recognize Jesus. That also was the case of other resurrection appearances, take for example Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb who takes Jesus to be the gardener.

I remember a tragic car crash that claimed the lives of five young women from our small community. Specifically I remember going to visit families in grief and shock living with the news that their daughters and sisters were dead. One man told me, concerning the death of his beloved daughter, "I can't see the goodness of God now. This is a black hole that blots out all of the light that has been in my life from God. But I know that the same loving God who was in my life before my daughter's death who provided for every need is still with me. And I know that the day will come when I'll see that love again." There are times when our eyes are dimmed by tears of grief and we can't see the love and grace of God even when it's standing right in front of us. Maybe it's not so strange that the early disciples didn't recognize the risen Lord. It happens to us too, maybe every day.

Biblical Parallels

One of the most striking parallels comes from Acts 8:26-40. Here again we have strangers come together in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. Think about what else these stories have in common. First both stories take place during a journey. There is ignorance of scripture and an explanation of Jesus' sufferings are made from scripture. There is a request for the *interpreter* to stay longer. Both stories involve sacraments. In the case of Emmaus it is the Eucharist and for the eunuch it is baptism. Both stories end with a sudden disappearance of the interpreter.

A Church in Decline

As I sit here and write I have on my desk a list of names of people who are members of my church who haven't worshipped in two to five years. People talk about the good old days when the church was filled with families and energetic children. Now there are less. We have a food pantry and children come with their relatives to enjoy a hot meal together and take home food and hygiene supplies. Maybe our church one day will look more like this group of people coming for help. When I mentioned this to a very compassionate woman who lovingly works with this group of people I was surprised at her response to this thought. "It will never work. We need new members and they need to look like us."

What road are we on? Cleopas and his companions were on the road to Emmaus but it might also be thought of as a road to nowhere. Such a short time ago they had been filled with hope and faith at the thought of following Jesus whom they had trusted as a prophet who was mighty in deed and word before God and people. Until hours ago they had lived with the hope that Jesus was the one to redeem all of Israel. Now they were leaving all of that behind. Drained of hope they are returning to old and sad lives.

What do we do when we feel ourselves drained of hope? What roads do we travel in our retreat as return to old lives remembering bitterly the hope that had been ours. We too find ourselves on roads to nowhere. But in our brokenness we find Christ walking alongside of us. If we give ourselves the chance that may come through friendships and relationships with people very different from ourselves. Now we find ourselves on a different road with growing hope as our hearts are warmed within us through those who might have forever been strangers.

Hospitality Around the Table

The Bible is rich with images of the table. Many of us treasure the 23rd Psalm with its rich table prepared for us in the presence of our enemies. I picture that as enemies made into friends and family. Tables are

places where the grace of God is acted out. Tables are sacred spaces be it for bread and wine at communion, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches with macaroni and cheese, enchiladas, lentils, curry dishes, stir-fries, or cheese burgers. If this isn't a picture of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Reign of God I don't know what is!

It is said of the book of Luke that Jesus is nearly always at a table, or going to a table, or coming from a table.

When we look for healing we look for doctor's test results that pronounce us cured. In Luke's Gospel the sign of healing is the gathering of people around a table where we are fed by the hand of God. We have opportunities like never before to have a variety of travelers join us on our journeys around the tables that we come to. Who knows who we eat with as we open our homes to the stranger? Maybe our guest is the prophet Elijah who is returning. Maybe we have angels gathered around our tables (Hebrews 13:2). Who wouldn't like to see an angel? As we find the peoples of the world around table together we see the power of God's healing.

The Best Is Yet To Come

God is creating a new world around us. Do we have open eyes to see it? Take heart! This is the Lord's doing as we go through changes toward a world transformed by the love of God. Faith and love can cast out all fear. We can find ourselves joyfully taking in God's diverse creation.