

Meeting the Risen Christ

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Luke 24:13-20, 25-26, 28-35

I don't know if you have ever thought of it this way,
but the Bible is a book of advice for travelers.

It seems as if everyone in the Bible is on a journey.

In the Old Testament

they are journeying to the Promised Land.

In the New Testament

it is to the Kingdom of God.

According to the Bible,

all of us are travelers.

There are some books in the Bible, such as Exodus, that read like a travel journal.

There are other books that give flat out advice like the Book of Proverbs.

on how to get along on your journey,

There are some, like the Book of Psalms,

that contain what are called "*Pilgrim Songs.*"

The 23rd Psalm is a Pilgrim Song.

"Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death."

It's for travelers.

In the New Testament it is just the same. Jesus said,

"The Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

That meant that

he was always moving, he had no permanent place. He just kept moving.

He recruited people by saying,

"Follow me."

He never said,

"Sit down next to me for a while, and we will have a little lesson here."

He said,

"Follow me. Keep moving."

The best travel advice of all in the Bible

is the advice that Paul gives to the Corinthians. He said

all you need on this journey is, "faith, hope, and love."

That's all. Travel light.

And he said,

"The greatest of these is love."

All through the New Testament the advice is essentially the same.

Travel light.

Don't get bogged down having to worry about your baggage.

Don't get preoccupied with the wrong things.

Don't get concerned about things

that are on the periphery of life,

the things that are not essential to life,

because you will miss the joy of the journey.

That is why when anybody asked Jesus advice

on how you travel in this life, how you get to the Kingdom of God,

he always gave the same advice. Travel light.

Like the rich young ruler who came to him and said,

"How can I reach the Kingdom of God?"

Jesus saw that he had many possessions. He said,

"You don't need all this baggage. Get rid of it."

What he told him was as simple as what Paul told the Corinthians. Paul said

all you need is, "faith, hope, and love."

Jesus said *all you need to make it in this life is,*

"Love God with all your heart and mind and soul,

and your neighbor as yourself." That's all you need.

That is the first thing that the Bible tells us about our journey. It says,

travel light.

But it says something else. The second thing it says is,

We will never be alone on the journey.

The first words in the history of the Jews,
which appears in the Book of Genesis, the twelfth chapter,
are God's instructions to Abraham and Sarah
*to leave your country and go on a journey,
and I will show you where to go.*
For the rest of their lives they travel.

The central story in the Old Testament is the story of the Exodus,
the Jewish people traveling across the desert wilderness for forty years.

They said

they didn't walk alone. God accompanied them all the way.

They said

they could see him. He was a "pillar of fire by night, and a cloud by day."

No sooner did they get settled down in the Promised Land,
they had to pack up and go on another journey,
this time into exile, to Babylon, a trip that nobody wanted to take.

To their amazement they discovered that
God accompanied them on that trip, too.

That is why the psalmist sings,

*Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
And whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend into heaven, thou art there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea
[that is to say, at the extremities of this life],
even there thy hand shall lead me,
and thy right hand shall hold me.*

That is the second thing the Bible says about your journey,
We will never be alone on the journey.

And that is exactly what Luke says the Resurrection means. It says,
we don't travel alone now. The Lord is with us.

He tells the story of the Road to Emmaus to illustrate that. It is a travel story.

Two people walking down the road to Emmaus.

We don't know who they are.

We do know that they are not among the twelve disciples.

We assume that they are some of the followers,

those people who heard Jesus say, "Follow me," and took him literally.

It sounds like it could be any of us.

Anyone who heard Jesus say "Follow me" and followed.

Luke says that the *name of one of them was Cleopas.*

That is about all we know about them.

It is interesting, though, that there is a man named Cleopas

who is the father of a bishop of Jerusalem.

Even more intriguing is the fact

that in the Gospel of John, one of the Marys

who was at the cross, according to John, was

"Mary the wife of Cleopas."

So it could very well be this man.

If so, then the *other man walking down the road with him*

isn't a man at all. It may be his wife, Mary.

They are going home.

They are leaving Jerusalem after the crucifixion,

despondent, defeated, discouraged, going home.

Now it is interesting to speculate on who they were.

But *that is not why this story is in the Bible.*

If this event had happened to one of the twelve,

then that would be reason for including it in the text,

because the twelve had superstar status in the Church,

and anything that happened to them was remembered and recorded.

But this is about someone who is not an apostle, just a nobody.

It is *there because this event can happen to you.*

If it happened to them, be prepared for it to happen to you.

Cleopas and Mary, or whoever it was,
walking down the road, talking it over,
their hopes extinguished in one fell swoop,
one sudden and ruthless blow. Just gone.
There is nothing they can do about it.
It's over. They are helpless now.

A stranger appears and walks down the road with them. The stranger says to them,
*"Excuse me. I couldn't help but overhear your conversation
about some terrible thing that has happened. Tell me about it."*

Cleopas says to the stranger,
"You must be the only one in Jerusalem who hasn't heard the news."

He told him about
*Jesus, the mighty prophet, how he was arrested,
and how he was tried unjustly, and how he was crucified.*

Then Cleopas said,
*"A strange thing happened. Some women visited the tomb. It was empty.
They saw an angel who told them, 'He's not here. He is risen.'
Some others came later and saw the same thing, the empty tomb,
although they didn't see the angel."*

Then they said,
*"We don't know. It is all so strange, all these events.
Anyway that's all past now. It's all over. We're going home."*

The stranger speaks. *"You know, it was all prophesied."*
Then he gives them a Bible lesson as they walk down the road,
till they come to a little town called Emmaus.

The stranger appeared to be going further. They said,
*"Will you stay with us? It is getting dark.
Why don't you have a meal with us?"*

So they go in the inn at Emmaus, and sit down.
*The stranger takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and hands it to them.
They recognize him. It's the Lord!*

Then he is gone. They said to each other, *"It was him! He was here with us!"*
They rush to Jerusalem and tell the eleven, *"The Lord has risen indeed!"*

It is a beautiful story. It is a communion story.

From the very beginning the Church saw it that way.

Even today it is most often interpreted as a communion story. It says
*that when we celebrate the Lord's Supper
The Risen Christ is always present,
Jesus is always the Host.*

But what I want you to see is that

before it is a communion story, it is a travel story.

Two people, discouraged, despondent, confused, angry.

Frederick Buechner says that

*Emmaus is the place we go to in order to escape
a bar, a movie, wherever it is we throw up our hands and say
"Let the whole world go hang... it makes no difference anyway:
Emmaus may be buying a new suit, or a new car
or smoking more cigarettes than you really want,.....
Emmaus may be going to church on Sunday,
Emmaus is whatever we do or
wherever we go to make ourselves forget
that the world hold nothing sacred;
that even the wisest and bravest and loveliest decay and die,
that even the noblest ideas that men have had
ideas about love and freedom and justice
have always in time been twisted out of shape
by selfish men for selfish ends."*

Have you seen pictures of the refugee camps in Darfur?

That is like the spiritual landscape of so many lives,
desolation and devastation.

The vision that these people had of *what life could be* is now crushed.

The hope that they had in this man is now gone.

He is gone. The hope is gone.

I know you have walked down an Emmaus Road.

I suppose all of us have.

It seems to us who go through it *that we are all alone.*

That is what makes it feel so utterly alone,
*because nobody knows what you have been through,
and you fear nobody really cares.*

Luke says

what Easter means is that you are not alone.

Luke tells us that in a story.

John puts that same message on the lips of Jesus when he says,

“I will not leave you comfortless. I will come to you.”

And before it is a communion story, and a travel story, it is a stranger story.

I want you to notice in this wonderful story the way he comes to us.

They didn't recognize him. They thought he was a stranger.

Which means,

if you are not alert, you will miss him.

In most of the resurrection appearance stories *Jesus is not recognized.*

In fact, in most of the cases, he is thought to be

a stranger, a gardener, a beachcomber.

I take this to mean a couple of things,

*Pay attention, the stranger you are ignoring or treating casually
just might be the risen Christ.*

You can interpret this missionally.

All those masses of people travelling though.

Migrant laborers, the homeless, the mentally ill

visitors to Call Primrose are strangers to us

and should be treated with respect and sensitivity

because the risen Christ most often appears as a stranger.

You can also interpret this spiritually.

That God's presence is always elusive and fleeting,

and dancing at the edge of our awareness and perception.

If we are honest we must confess

that our awareness of God is never constant, steady or predictable.

We may perceive God for a moment here or there

and then the ordinary world closes in again.

This may be why we have to learn
to treasure those God moments in our hearts.
To keep them, and nurture them and study them
and remember and tell about them.

Also, before it is a communion story
before it is a travel story, before it is a stranger story
it is a story about Bible Study.
It is a *story about Christ coming to us when we open the scriptures*
and read and share with a heart of faith.

The two in Emmaus, exclaim,
Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us
on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?

How many of you have heard God speak to you through scripture?
It is not an **academic exercise** is it?
It is the exercise of faith. reading with the lens of discipleship
to have Christ speak to you

After Easter, **all the assigned texts focus on meeting the risen Christ.**
Last week Kristen told us about **Thomas and meeting Christ through our scars.**

This week the text lays it out for us.
We meet God on the road,
We meet God, when we encounter the stranger,
We meet God when the scriptures are opened and explained to us.
We meet God in the breaking of bread in communion.

Someday each one of us will make the walk to Emmaus.

The Bible tell us that
our faith is not really a factor in life until we begin a such a journey.
Only then will we see what faith is able to do.

We've seen it!
People journey through terrible times with a confidence
that they are not alone
that everything will turn out all right.

Others, surrounded by a host of dangers,
are able to live with a sense of celebration of the gift of life.

They know that danger awaits them
But they live as if they know the end of the story.

They enjoy the life that is given to them now,
caring nothing about the time that is to come.

***That is what faith looks like;
celebrating life as it is given to you right now,
while a host of enemies encamp about you.***

It's really something!
I go see them, I go visit their homes.
As I walk up to their door,
I pass through all those enemies of life encamped about their home.

I can feel them there as I approach the door.
It makes me uneasy. I know they are there.
Death is there waiting.
Pain, he's there too.
Loneliness, she's pitching her tent for the whole siege,
right there next to despair
They are all there outside of the house, waiting.

I go in and I say,
"You know what's waiting for you, don't you?"
"Yes" they know.
"They almost caught up with me some months ago," they say.
"But I trust that the Lord is with me.
And that gives me a strange peace.
A peace that I have never known before in my life.
I don't know what's going to happen in the future,
but I know now that I can face it.
And I am enjoying each day as it comes to me.
I am enjoying each day as if it were a gift from God.

*I've never seen my life that way before, but I see it now.
My life is a banquet at which my cup runneth over."*

We talk about different things, but I can't get it off my mind.

I keep thinking about those enemies encamped about the house.

So I say

*"You know the time will come when this respite will end,
and you'll have to take your journey again."*

*"I know, And all those enemies I know, too,
are going to pack up and follow me.*

They've been doing that for months now.

They have been following me.

But so have Goodness and Mercy, for much longer.

In fact goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life.

So I know that when the time comes, I will not travel alone.

The God who is with me now,

*and the God who has been with me all the days of my life,
will be with me then.*

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

The point is that Easter is not over at sundown Easter Sunday.

It stretches in to the rest of our lives

The women couldn't call back the angels.

The two on the road may never see that stranger again.

But it doesn't matter because Easter continues every day.

So how can we not go and tell?

Amen