

Luke 24:13-35

Emmaus

According to the Gospel of Luke, the town of Emmaus, was about seven miles away from Jerusalem, to the northwest, as it turns out. For people like us in the age of the automobile, this isn't very far. We can travel that distance in 10 or 15 minutes, depending on the traffic. For people who had to walk, it would take quite a bit longer, perhaps three hours or so. The town itself is of no particular consequence, it just happened to be the destination of a couple of lesser known followers of Jesus on the first day of the week after the tragic Passover at which Jesus was crucified.

The distance gave them time to discuss the events of the previous week. Along the way they were met by a traveler who began asking them questions as if he was unaware of their grief, the brokenness of the cross. They did not recognize him.

A Reunion Experience

Such are the powers of the human mind; when someone or something is out-of-context, it doesn't see. Context is an important part of familiarity. Sometimes, when we run into someone in one context that we know from another, we say we can't "place" them. If we are given the context, we can recognize and remember.

I am reminded of my 30th high school reunion. Among the first people I encountered were two women, one of whom I had sat behind in eighth grade math, and the other I had sat beside in the same class. I went to a large suburban school with about 1,000 people in my grade, so it was against the odds that I would sit by this particular pair; both intimidatingly beautiful and successful, most-likely-to-succeed and valedictorian, and that was in high school, even in the eighth grade; or that even at a reunion I would meet them. It did not take but a moment to see they had both done very well.

I said, "hi," and called them by name. I could see by the looks on their faces that they had no idea who I was. Now I knew they were both more memorable than I, but I was embarrassed in those awkward moments before they read my name tag, that I had made so little an impression on them that they couldn't place me even at a reunion when they knew the context to draw from.

Thankfully, when they saw my name, the lights came on and they recognized my face and immediately lied. They said, "you look exactly the same, you haven't changed a bit."

I wonder if it was anything like that when those two disciples sat in that room at the table where Jesus

broke bread and gave thanks and they finally saw, I mean really saw, Jesus, all resurrected right in front of them.

The Face of Jesus

Ever since the Ascension of Christ into heaven Christians have been trying to resurrect some idea of what his face must have looked like. The world is a barren place without Jesus in it. It is a great spiritual challenge for us to remember, and recognize.

I am sure you know that our pictures of Jesus reveal more about us than about him. We are tempted to make Jesus out to be something like us; fair skin, blonde or light brown hair, blue eyes. Other people from other backgrounds do the same. It is hard to say what a middle-eastern Asian Galilean Jewish man may have looked like 2,000 years ago, but I am sure we wouldn't recognize his face if we saw it. We are forced by circumstances to recognize Jesus in other ways.

The Scriptures

The story in Luke's gospel says they recognized him in the scriptures. They saw him in the great liberator and lawgiver Moses and in the stories about David the shepherd boy who slew the giant and fought the Philistines. They saw him in the Suffering Servant of

Isaiah which means they saw the willingness to suffer, to live and die, for someone else; and they saw him in the Psalms that give thanks but question everything and complain and grieve as well as confess and proclaim.

And I think there is more than that. They saw Jesus in the things that the law and the prophets represent; the call to authentic faith, goodness and right living, and the call to justice and mercy.

We too, can recognize Jesus in the world and in our lives whenever we see goodness and justice and mercy played out. I must say, sometimes we don't see it, especially when it comes from people who think about it and talk about it in different ways than we do.

I am discouraged by the divisions among us; like the liberal/conservative division. I have felt and also seen the way one side demonizes the other, the way assumptions are made that because the other has different ideas, they must not be authentic, and therefore not good, not trustworthy.

The language we use about one another is sometimes so extreme that it is no wonder that we can't see Jesus, and can't seem to understand the scriptures so well. The best thing we can say is that we "distrust"

them. Other, more impartial observers might just say we “hate.”

Breaking the Bread

The story also says that when they got to Emmaus, it looked like he was going further, but they invited him in and asked him to stay for dinner. While there, he took some bread and broke it, giving thanks; and at that moment, they *saw*. And then, after they had really seen, he just disappeared. Can't you hear them, “He looked just like himself, hadn't changed a bit!” When something like that happens, we remember the place. Emmaus is the name of that place.

There is something about human interaction that facilitates vision. Clearly, there is a reference here to the Last Supper, which had taken place only a few days earlier and was surely on the author's mind.

What it also refers to is the many times they had shared meals together, which means they were an everyday part of each others lives. We tend to recognize those who are an everyday part of our lives.

The Two Together

The connection to the grand movements of history, and the peoples of the past and of the world, along with all

the concerns of the present age, and, all the down-close personal relationships, family and friends, and everyday circumstances of life that make heavy demands on us all; in the gospel, the two are put together, melded together in a dynamic way that forms and shapes us, and when we are thoughtful about it; we find our Emmaus.

The resurrection is not a light-hearted party where everything is nice and sweet. It is like going to a poorly attended reunion and meeting old friends one struggles to recognize. All I can say is that, if you want to understand Jesus, show up! Pay attention! Live your life open-minded and open-hearted and open-eyed.

And there are some conditions: one can't be in control of the situation, it happens on its own terms; one must set aside selfish concerns and pre-conceived notions about what life in Easter is like, and about what the resurrected Lord is like.

Once Emmaus happens, it can't be ignored. We are compelled by the victory of life and goodness and meaning to hope, to meaningful action and cautious optimism, to citizenship and justice, to a high standard of morality and to a respect and love for every person, and to a grief-beyond-words at the sight of the brokenness we see all around.

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