

Easter 3 A 2020

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

April 26, 2020

Luke 24:13-35

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

Today's gospel reading is known as the Emmaus story, or the Road to Emmaus story. Nobody actually knows exactly where that is. Emmaus is a name that means warm spring, and there are a lot of places in the Middle East with that name. Luke says it was seven miles outside of Jerusalem.

It's one of the best-loved stories of the Bible. One suspects that's partly due to its secret. Jesus is not recognized. And he dramatically reveals himself at the end. This is reminiscent of Bible stories like Joseph and his brothers from Genesis. Or it's reminiscent of fairy tales like Cinderella. Someone is in disguise until the very happy ending.

Another compelling part of this story that might explain why believers love it is that the two individuals in the story are not from The Twelve. So this isn't James and John and Peter and Andrew. It's two people. One named Cleopas. Whom we know nothing about. And the other one's name is not given. In Luke's gospel, Jesus has this inner circle of The Twelve. But he also has an outer circle of followers, men and women whose names are mostly not known to us. This story takes place among that outer circle. And so I think that's an easier point of entry for those of us who live at a distance in time from Jesus. We may not be Thomas and Philip and Matthew, but the fact that on Easter Day Jesus appears to these two virtually unknown followers in the outer circle invites us to imagine that this is not just a story about something that happened to a select group. This is a story for the rest of us. And that may also explain its appeal.

Part of its peculiar appeal to me is that these two characters— these two outer circle followers of Jesus— are fundamentally kind. Without a clue, but fundamentally kind. Without hope, but fundamentally kind. The pinnacle of their cluelessness and kindness comes at the moment when they say: *Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.* Luke tells us they urged him strongly. *Stay with us.* That's because it would be dangerous after dark. Traveling on the road was dangerous in broad daylight. Luke has already told us Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. About getting mugged and left for dead in broad daylight.

So what these clueless but kind individuals are doing is inviting Jesus to come in off of the road and stay with them *for his protection*. Maybe it's an inn where they are staying. It seems more likely that they were staying with a friend or a family member because Emmaus was their

destination. They think Jesus is vulnerable, perhaps even a little foolish, because he wants to toodle off on down the road into the darkness. So they take him under their wing. Clueless, but kind.

The other moment in the story when they revealed their lack of a clue and their lack of hope was when Cleopas said to Jesus: *Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?* Everybody is talking about this. It would be like Covid-19. It's all anybody can talk about. And Jesus made the mistake of asking them, "What are you guys talking about?" What else would we be talking about, is their reaction. *Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?* But they don't ridicule Jesus. They may be without a clue. They may be without hope. But they are fundamentally kind. So they tell him what has happened to their group. To the group of followers around Jesus. To the inner circle and the outer circle. And not only do they talk to Jesus. but they listen. He apparently gives them quite a Bible study. Because later they will say that their hearts were burning within them.

So there's a fundamental irony in the story in that the two travelers take pity on Jesus. And they see him as being kind of clueless. Not aware of what everyone is talking about. Not sharp enough to stay of the road after dark. We know who he is. But they don't. And at the climax of the story, in the breaking of bread, they recognize him, and then they realize that they were the ones who were clueless, they were the ones who needed guidance.

When I think of these two travelers, they remind me of so many people I know. Including the guy in the mirror, me. We church people can certainly be clueless. Prone to thinking that we know it all. Which is probably the biggest red flag of all that somebody is clueless. We can be without a clue.

We can also lose our hope. The two travelers in this story put their hope in the past tense, which is so poignant: *But we had hoped that he was the one.* We had hoped. It's all over now. We've been defeated. Many things might make us feel defeated. The world as it was even before coronavirus was pretty depressing. We had hoped. Church people can feel like the light isn't shining very brightly anymore. Good people can feel pretty forlorn.

And yet, for those two people— Cleopas, whoever he was, and the other one, whoever she or he may have been— Christ walked with them. And their kindness— as clueless and as hopeless as they felt— their decency to this stranger on the road is what allowed Jesus to reveal himself to them. And in revealing himself, to resuscitate their hope and their joy and their purpose.

I suppose a sermon somewhere, a preacher somewhere, might say that the lesson of this story is "Don't be clueless!" "Don't be foolish!" I say the opposite. The lesson of this story is that despite the fact that sometimes we have no clue, and despite the fact that sometimes we have no hope, be kind. Be gentle. Jesus lives and he will reveal himself to us. In ways that will resuscitate our hope and our joy and our purpose. In the meantime. Be kind. Amen.