

“Emmaus”

A Baptism Meditation

Easter 3

Luke 24: 13-35

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From the Pulpit

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Prayer for Illumination: Open our hearts and minds, O God, by the power of your Holy Spirit. Silence in us any voice by your own. Grant that we may feel your presence, as did the followers who knew Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Amen.

The Cleveland Indians' locker room after a ten-inning game seven. The Hillary Clinton campaign headquarters early on November 9. The emergency room after an unsuccessful tracheotomy. A lonely bathroom where a plus sign just won't appear on a pregnancy test. A quiet office after a pink slip is found on the desk.¹

This is where Cleopas and his companion find themselves. They've lost. They're defeated. The air sucked out of the room. They walk from Jerusalem in a fog of disbelief that disoriented many that day. On that road, they recounted to one another the previous days' events- Jesus' trial, crucifixion, and burial. They gave up everything to follow that man they knew as the savior.

They needed so much that day. They needed get out of town. They needed different scenery. They needed fresh air. They needed to try to make sense of the senseless. They needed something to give certainty in an uncertain time. So they plodded down that road wearing stone sandals.

¹ Jeffrey M. Gallagher, *The Christian Century*, Scripture notes, March 31, 2017. This was his introduction and it was striking to me.

We know the drill: one foot in front of another, convince ourselves of a death we won't believe, the dull ache of memory, absence of a future with the beloved. The events in Jerusalem were not what they had hoped for. The road seemed like the escape route for those leaving the chaos of Jerusalem.

Then, somewhere along the road a stranger meets them. "Whatcha talkin' about?" he asks. We know about strangers on the road. They are to be avoided. Roads leading away from Jerusalem, like the road to Jericho prove dangerous, filled with bandits and robbers. But the one who joins these two seems to be more like a traveling companion than a stranger. Cleopas and his companion seem a little baffled when this stranger had no idea of the events over the last few days. Yet this man keeps walking alongside them; listening to them recount the events.

How were they supposed to know who this stranger was? Their eyes were kept from recognizing him. Maybe in their mental fatigue they couldn't exactly make out all of his features to tell who he really was. But what helped pass the time was that he did know everything about Jesus' life.

The road had led them to a place where they could exhale and relax. They came in to the village to settle in for the night. Their new companion was going on ahead, but they pleaded with him to stay. They were hungry. They were tired. They were full of sorrow.

For the travelers, it didn't matter how far away Emmaus was. Emmaus was a place to leave the worries of the world behind, a place to search for answers that they certainly didn't find along the road.

Interestingly, archeologists have searched for and found other cities along the roads leading from Jerusalem but haven't really identified the place called Emmaus. Maybe that's ok. Maybe for all that happens in Emmaus--Emmaus is something more than archeology, something more than a place on the map.

Emmaus offers a respite from the complexity and pain of life; certainly for those two travelers. Author Fredrick Buechner is persuasive in his collection of sermons, called, *The Magnificent Defeat*. He speaks of the many ways we seek to find a place, an Emmaus. He suggests that, we search for a place to run to when we have lost hope, or don't know what else to do. He says this, "Emmaus is the place we go to in order to escape—a bar, a movie, wherever it is we throw up our hands. . . . Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred."² Emmaus is the place of escape, of forgetting, of giving up, of deadening our senses and our minds and perhaps even our hearts, too.

² Buechner, Frederick. *The Magnificent Defeat*, New York: Seabury, 1966, 85-86.

Maybe you've been there, Emmaus? A place where you never thought you would find yourself, but were forced there because of circumstance. You wear those stone sandals around your feet and plod along through the muck and messiness. The fogginess is almost too thick. The burdens are too great. The grief--unbearable. Maybe it's after the loss of a loved one. The uncertainty of losing your job. When a relationship you cared so much about disintegrates. When life doesn't meet with your expectations. You find yourself there...in your own Emmaus.

Maybe for you Emmaus is the beach, where the waves and ocean breeze seem to calm all that is unsettled in your life. Or maybe it is a walk in the woods, where the only sounds are the leaves rustling underfoot or the creak of the old trees swaying in the wind. Or maybe Emmaus is a golf course, or a book, or a darkened room, anywhere you go to escape the pain and to search for answers.

We all have an Emmaus, whether we know it or not. Fredrick Buechner even says "Emmaus maybe going to church on a Sunday." How many of us, straggle in on a Sunday morning after a frazzled and over-programmed week? A week, paralyzed by cynicism or stress. We might feel pre-occupied, or powerless to all that is going on around us. With all that weighs us down, we plod along through the fogginess of our very complicated

world and we find ourselves here searching for answers or guidance or encouragement.

Maybe that's why Cleopas and his friend did not want the stranger to go on ahead of them. They wanted to hear more of these stories about Jesus, to remind them of their friend and teacher. Maybe they wanted to keep the memory of Jesus close to their hearts as a comfort to them in this dark time.

I would imagine the dinner was like any other dinner, a simple meal with nuts and fruit, and bread and wine, prepared by someone in the house or inn where they were staying. But it was at that dinner, that the most remarkable thing happened. There, while at table, the stranger, (the invited guest) became the host when he took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them.

Jesus used these words at various moments of his ministry. These words were a familiar pattern they had heard before. And they knew Jesus used to say those words. When Jesus took five loaves and two fish and fed the five thousand, he said those words. Or at the Passover meal with his disciples; he said those words. Or here at the Emmaus table, it must have been Jesus who took bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.... In that moment---in that very moment, their eyes were opened and they recognized him---they saw Jesus, their risen Christ. In all their time traveling with the stranger, their

eyes were kept from recognizing him, and now...here and now, this simple meal, became a special meal they would never forget.

This was a huge revelation for the two. Jesus didn't come to them in Jerusalem. He didn't wait for them at home. Rather, He met them where they were in their lives. On the road. Amidst all their pain, frustration and disbelief that threatened to overwhelm them. Jesus found them on the road and now he found them in their Emmaus. He found them at the table.

Whether at that table of grace or on the Emmaus road, just as Jesus found them, Jesus meets us, even if it feels like a road to nowhere. Jesus walks with us to every Emmaus, for as long as we need. Surely, in our lives, there will be another road to walk down. There will always be another Emmaus that we will escape to when the circumstances around us are unbearable. Jesus will meet us again and again whether we recognize him or not.

So, don't turn your backs. Keep the doors of your hearts open. Keep your minds open to all the ways Jesus will find us, in scripture, in this place of worship, on the march for justice, on our journey, or in our darkest moments.

And for the little child of God baptized today, Ruth Eloise Prendergast, she comes up out of the water of baptism and

receives new life. She is now on the road. For Ruth and for her parents, we don't know what the road will be like. We know she has had quite a journey so far. We don't know the challenges and the joys and heartache and successes she will see, but we do know this. God has always loved her. God will always love her and God will never ever let her go. Wherever she goes, Jesus is there. Where ever she doubts or falters or wonders, Jesus will meet her on that road. And he will walk with her. As he does with you and all of us.

On that Emmaus road, at the table, in our lives--each day Jesus shows up, whether we notice and know or whether we don't. We know the Risen Christ finds us; shattered, exhausted, defeated, skeptical, or hopeful, or thankful. Christ meets us here now---he has been here before---he will be here again—he will be with us always.

Amen.

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